



GREAT OUTDOORS
COLORADO

Great Outdoors Colorado Strategic Plan

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Foreword

The 2002 revision to the Strategic Plan that guides the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Board's spending was necessitated by a number of factors:

Continuing GOCO's Tradition of Seeking Input: With new Board members and senior staff joining GOCO since the adoption of the 1999 plan, the Board wanted to continue GOCO's rich tradition of seeking input from grantees and citizens about whether grant programs currently being offered are meeting the needs of the state.

GOCO's Revenue Outlook: Lottery proceeds, GOCO's sole source of revenue, have declined in recent years due to decreasing interest in lottery games. While Powerball will reverse that downward trend in the short-term, GOCO must assume it will have to achieve its mission over the long-term with fewer dollars than were anticipated.

From June through September 2001, GOCO Board and staff conducted a series of meetings in 13 cities across the state: Alamosa, Broomfield, Colorado Springs, Denver, Durango, Fort Morgan, Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, Las Animas, Littleton, Loveland, Steamboat Springs and Trinidad. More than 800 people participated. In addition, Walt Klein & Associates conducted a telephone survey of 600 citizens.

Through this process it is clear that GOCO's funding will remain an important tool in addressing the outdoor resource challenges Colorado faces. Much has been achieved since GOCO awarded its first grants in 1994; however, there is still much more to do. Demand for GOCO grants, which has outpaced dollars available by three to one since 1994, will continue to grow. The need to continue to work together in partnership to achieve GOCO's mission is more necessary than ever.

The goals outlined in this plan have been developed with the future of Colorado in mind. In implementing this plan, the GOCO Board and staff will strive to ensure that its decisions have a lasting, meaningful impact on preserving and enhancing Colorado's natural heritage, that we enhance the quality of life for Coloradans and keep our state as special tomorrow as it is today.

Vision, Mission, Guiding Principles

The Board's vision and mission statements and guiding principles articulate its philosophy and approach:

Vision: To fulfill the trust of the people of Colorado through wise, leveraged investments in the natural resource values of Colorado.

Mission: To help the people of Colorado preserve, protect, enhance, appreciate, and enjoy our parks, wildlife, trails, rivers, and open space through strategic grants, partnerships, and leadership.

Guiding Principles:

Integrity is never compromised. We pledge honesty, accountability, and an open process.

We are financially responsible. We believe in maximizing the value of public dollars. We protect the assets of the Trust and invest them prudently.

We reach our goals through cooperation. We work to empower our partners and to leverage our resources, optimize results, and, wherever possible, award grants to projects that integrate the GOCO funding categories of wildlife, outdoor recreation, open space, and local government.

We are flexible and innovative. We seek out and respond to opportunities that otherwise might be lost. We appreciate both traditional and unconventional approaches to complex projects. We encourage and support entrepreneurial endeavors and partnering with other entities.

Careful listening and thoughtful investigation guide our decision-making. We acquire advice, ideas, and information from grantees, stakeholders, and all of Colorado's geographically, ethnically, and culturally diverse citizens. We will continue to consider stakeholder input and guidance as to how GOCO can best achieve its mission. We will also work to expand the individuals and groups from whom we seek input.

We proactively and responsively pursue our mission. We are guided by the needs and aspirations of the people of Colorado and will be anticipatory in our approach to help people realize their goals.

We measure our results. We evaluate our decisions and measure our results against our vision, mission and guiding principles, as well as the goals of the people of Colorado as outlined in Article XXVII of the State Constitution and the Strategic Plan.

We strive for a sustainable, lasting legacy. We recognize that growth challenges the sustainability of Colorado's ecosystems. We value projects that anticipate the state's long-term needs and protect its heritage.

We provide statewide leadership. We are a leading partner with our stakeholders and serve as a catalyst and communicator to achieve GOCO's goals. We stimulate dialogue and cooperation among local, state, and federal government interests as well as those in the private and nonprofit sectors.

We value our employees. We value our employees and assist them in realizing their highest levels of technical and professional skills.

GOCO's Constitutional Framework

Article XXVII of the Colorado Constitution requires GOCO to allocate its proceeds to four areas in substantially equal portions over time:

Wildlife program grants through the Division of Wildlife which:

- Develop watchable wildlife opportunities
- Implement educational programs about wildlife and wildlife environment
- Provide appropriate programs for maintaining Colorado's diverse wildlife heritage
- Protect crucial wildlife habitats through the acquisition of lands, leases, or easements and restore critical areas

Outdoor Recreation program grants through the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR; also referred to as Colorado State Parks) which:

- Establish and improve state parks and recreation areas throughout the state of Colorado
- Develop appropriate public information and environmental education resources on Colorado's natural resources at state parks, recreation areas, and other locations throughout the state
- Acquire, construct, and maintain trails and river greenways
- Provide water for recreational purposes through the acquisition of water rights or through agreements with the holders of water rights, all in accord with applicable state water law

Open Space and Natural Areas program grants through the Colorado Divisions of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and Wildlife, or municipalities, counties, or other political subdivisions of the state, or nonprofit land conservation entities to:

- Identify unique open space and natural areas of statewide significance
- Acquire unique open space and natural areas of statewide significance
- Manage unique open space and natural areas of statewide significance

Local Government program grants to:

- Match local investments to acquire, develop, and manage open space
- Match local investments to acquire, develop, and manage parks
- Match local investments to acquire, develop, and manage environmental education facilities

In addition, the Board will use the latitude provided in the Amendment “to make expenditures which it considers necessary and proper to the accomplishment of the purposes of the amendment.”

Overall Objectives

The GOCO Board's intention is to meet, to the greatest extent possible, the diversity of needs throughout the state and fund the diversity of projects envisioned in the GOCO Constitutional Amendment. Objectives it will strive to meet through its grant programs are:

Protecting wildlife and habitats: Colorado's remarkable diversity of native species provide a truly natural legacy that is at risk.

Protecting important river corridors: These corridors provide rich and diverse terrestrial and aquatic habitats, public and privately owned open space corridors, and recreational opportunities.

Protecting strategic agricultural lands: Working agricultural landscapes provide for wildlife habitat, open space, scenic view corridors, and/or community separators.

Protecting open space corridors and greenbelts: Establishment of these corridors protects the unique identity and character of communities and/or provides wildlife habitat, scenic view corridors and community separators.

Providing land and facilities for outdoor recreation: Developing new and enhancing existing outdoor recreation areas is necessary to meet the high demand for places to play ball, hike, relax, and camp.

Providing opportunities to engage youth in outdoor activities: Youth activities and environmental education programs provide a significant opportunity to involve the future stewards of the state's natural resources in the outdoors.

GOCO's Grant Programs

Since 1994, with direction and guidance provided by the Amendment on how to invest GOCO funds, the Board has developed seven grant programs. Overall, we learned from the strategic planning process that these programs are meeting the objectives of Coloradans with the caveat that stakeholders and citizens alike recognize that additional funds are needed to meet Colorado's outdoor needs.

Open Space Grant Program

GOCO will continue its open space program that helps protect greenways and stream corridors, community separators, agricultural land, urban open space, natural areas, nongame wildlife habitat, and buffers around and inholdings in State Parks, state wildlife areas and other state lands.

Local Government Park, Outdoor Recreation, and Environmental Education Facilities Program

GOCO will continue to work with small and large communities to meet a wide diversity of recreational needs through the local government park, outdoor recreation, and environmental education facilities program.

Regional differences in recreational pastimes will be taken into account when considering grant applications. While **outdoor** facilities will remain the focus of this program, GOCO may in limited circumstances consider funding indoor facilities that have a significant nexus with outdoor activities.

This program will feature regular grants and mini-grants. Mini-grants are designed to meet the needs of small communities that may not have the financial or staff resources to compete in the regular grant cycle. From time to time, the Board may offer multi-year, mid-range grants to fund larger outdoor recreation complexes and other appropriate facilities.

Investments through Colorado State Parks

GOCO will continue to fund Colorado State Parks as part of that agency's efforts to fulfill growing visitor demand for a quality park and recreation experience. Funds will help purchase buffers around parks to protect them from encroaching development; to continue establishing and enhancing existing facilities, including visitor centers, campgrounds, and trails; to acquire water for recreational use, and; to sponsor education and resource protection projects.

Investments through the Division of Wildlife

GOCO will continue to fund Division of Wildlife programs as part of that agency's efforts to recover threatened and endangered species, protect critical wildlife habitat, develop wildlife watching opportunities, and provide wildlife education experiences for youth and adults.

Trails Grant Program

GOCO will continue to provide funding through the State Trails Program to enable communities and regional partnerships to build new trails, connect existing trails to one another and to recreation areas, to restore trails that receive heavy use, and to acquire lands critical to trail access.

Legacy Initiative

GOCO's multi-quadrant Legacy Program has produced some of Colorado's most outstanding and lasting land preservation successes. GOCO retains its commitment to high dollar, multi-dimensional projects that draw funds from each of GOCO's four quadrants. Support for this approach was affirmed during the stakeholder process and in the public opinion survey.

The successor program, the Great Outdoors Colorado Legacy Initiative, will continue to emphasize the importance of forging partnerships that cross political and jurisdictional boundaries so that funds can be leveraged to the greatest extent possible. Local governments, Colorado State Parks, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, land trusts, federal agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners, and the private sector working together will be the key to success. The Legacy Initiative will be broad in scope and seek to incorporate the wide range of program objectives laid out in the GOCO Constitutional Amendment. Projects could include landscape scale land preservation, species protection initiatives, and development of state and local recreational opportunities.

Planning & Capacity Building Grant Program

GOCO will continue to offer grants for planning and capacity building so that communities can plan for future outdoor needs and work to preserve their character in the face of rapid growth and organizations can continue to build their capacity to advance projects that relate to GOCO's mission.

Outcome of additional topics related to grant programs:

A number of topics that affect more than one grant program were also discussed during the Strategic Planning process. The Board considered that feedback in formulating policies and future efforts that relate to these matters:

GOCO's Relationship with the Agricultural Community

Throughout Colorado, whether in Denver or rural communities, citizens expressed their belief that the preservation of agricultural land is key to GOCO's success. In addition to providing food and fiber, Colorado's agricultural lands provide wildlife, scenic, and community natural resource values. They are essential to our quality of life.

With 88 percent of Colorado's private lands currently in agriculture, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve many important public benefits related to GOCO's mission -- wildlife habitat, open space, scenic view corridors, and/or community separators -- without the cooperation, support, and participation of the agricultural community.

GOCO will continue to work to build its relationship with the agricultural community to meet our compatible goals of open space protection and ensuring working landscapes.

Land Conservation Techniques

GOCO has used two techniques to carry out its mission of land conservation: acquisition of fee title and use of permanent conservation easements. The Board prefers the use of permanent conservation easements, which allow GOCO funds to go further than with fee title acquisitions while at the same time contributing to maintaining a working landscape.

Protection of lands in perpetuity is the preferred method of the Board. However, it may consider funding term easements and/or management agreements (paying landowners to preserve land for a limited number of years) should circumstances arise where their use would be beneficial to advancing GOCO's mission.

Public Access to Lands Preserved with GOCO's Assistance

As an entity that uses public dollars, GOCO looks for opportunities to fund projects that have the widest range of public benefits including access to land for such activities as hiking, fishing, and hunting.

However, GOCO recognizes public access is not the primary objective of many land preservation projects nor is it always appropriate. This is especially true in the case of lands preserved with conservation easements, primarily agricultural land, where private landowners still own the property. Adequate public benefit is received in these cases from the preservation of wildlife habitat and view corridors.

Where GOCO funds help purchase lands in fee title, GOCO will work to make sure that appropriate public access is available, provided that access does not disturb sensitive wildlife habitat. To achieve this goal, grant applications for land preservation funds that are fee title purchases will be scored higher if public access is provided. Because of GOCO's respect for private property rights, applications for conservation easement funding will not be scored on providing public access.

On land that has been permanently protected, GOCO may also consider making funds available for leases that would pay private owners for limited and appropriate public access to their property such as for hunting, fishing, and trail access.

Water Conservation

The GOCO Amendment contemplates that acquisition of water rights and resources may be necessary to achieve the broad mission of GOCO.

In recognition of the importance of water rights in land transactions the GOCO Board may consider the feasibility of including water resources/water rights in a meaningful way in its goals and programs so long as such programs protect private property rights and are consistent with Colorado water law.

Matching Requirements and the Need for Leverage and Partnership

The need for matching funds from applicants is a key component of GOCO's grant decisions for two principal reasons:

- Demand for GOCO dollars, which overall is three times higher than dollars available, makes it necessary for GOCO to leverage its funds to the greatest extent possible so that a majority of quality projects can receive some assistance.
- Match is a key indicator of community support for a project and of its eventual long-term success and sustainability.

GOCO recognizes that the level of match required can be more difficult for some smaller, less prosperous communities. GOCO will, with stakeholder input, continue to look for methods to equalize the burdens of match for such communities that demonstrate a compelling need.

Regardless of any matching requirement changes, GOCO will continue to place an emphasis on project sponsors forging strong partnerships that result in maximum leveraging of resources.

Board Initiatives and Its Approach to Grant-Making

Board Initiatives

Since 1994, Great Outdoors Colorado has worked to provide leadership through its grant-making process by encouraging innovative and creative projects, promoting partnerships, leveraging resources, and integrating efforts among public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. Beyond awarding grants for projects, GOCO will undertake some additional initiatives to achieve its mission:

External fundraising: A specific initiative the Board was encouraged to pursue during its meetings is actively seeking funds from other sources. GOCO will explore additional funding opportunities including federal and private funding.

Bonding: In November 2001, Colorado voters approved a measure that gives GOCO the authority to bond its future lottery revenues for urgent land preservation projects. The GOCO Board will carefully consider when and how to use this tool in a fiscally responsible fashion.

Actively pursuing projects: GOCO will continue to provide technical assistance in areas of the state where a more proactive approach by GOCO could result in significant land conservation and outdoor recreation projects that will be of benefit to its citizens.

Department of Natural Resources: GOCO will continue to work closely with the Department of Natural Resources and the three Boards whose missions have elements that overlap with GOCO's mission: the State Parks Board, the Wildlife Commission, and the State Land Board.

Diverse populations: GOCO will communicate information about funding opportunities and activities to diverse populations and will work to disseminate information about Colorado's parks, trails, and wildlife areas in strategic locations that serve diverse communities.

Indicators of success/annual evaluation: GOCO will track its progress in preserving and enhancing parks, wildlife, trails, rivers, and open space.

Approach to Grant-Making

As they have since 1994, GOCO applications will require project sponsors to meet several of the following funding criteria. However, the Board may consider special circumstances that prevent an applicant's project from meeting all criteria:

Partnership, leveraging, and matching requirements: As previously stated, due to the high demand for GOCO dollars, GOCO will continue to place an emphasis on project sponsors forging strong partnerships that result in maximum leveraging of resources. Providing matching resources — both cash and in-kind — will continue to be a requirement.

Integration: GOCO will continue to encourage that, where feasible, projects integrate as many components of GOCO's four funding categories as possible. The Board will also strive to see that GOCO's programs complement efforts of other state agencies, federal agencies, local governments, special districts, nonprofit organizations, the private sector, and volunteers.

Planning: Because projects funded outside the context of a plan are more likely to yield fewer results in the long run, projects need to be part of some overall community, regional, or statewide plan. A higher priority will be placed on projects where plans are in place for the immediate and proximate areas and jurisdiction that are consistent with the objectives of the proposed project.

Environmental Education: When feasible, the project should provide access to and opportunities for environmental education.

Project sustainability: Sponsors need to demonstrate that they are financially able to complete and have viable plans for the operation, maintenance, and management of projects.

Impact: The project should address a local or statewide need and benefit a local community, a region, or the state.

Environmental impact: The project should avoid, minimize, or mitigate any negative impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and, where possible, should provide beneficial impact to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Stewardship: The Board acknowledges that providing resources for the stewardship of open space, parks, and wildlife habitat acquisitions that have been funded by GOCO is a part of its mission. The Board will continue to work with grantees to assist with stewardship on lands purchased with GOCO funds. Generally, however, the Board does not anticipate funding routine operations and maintenance activities.

Caps on grants: Specific limits for grants will be reviewed from cycle to cycle with changes in maximum grant awards being discussed with stakeholders.

Multi-year grants: The Board will consider multi-year grant requests for all types of eligible projects, except for mini-grants. Generally, the projects must rank in the top tier of successful projects to receive a multi-year funding commitment.

GOCO's Grant Process: GOCO will work with grantees to continue to find ways to make applying for grants and meeting grant requirements simpler. GOCO will strive to be flexible to meet the varying circumstances of projects and needs of communities.