



Case Study

A FORMAL COALITION IN COLORADO ACCELERATES CONSERVATION BY ORGANIZING DECISION-MAKING ABOUT STATEWIDE PRIORITIES COLORADO, U.S.A.

Directing collective private land protection efforts becomes possible by creating a formal agreement of protection priorities in map form.

The Nature Conservancy of Colorado played a catalytic role in the creation of a formal coalition consisting of the Colorado Conservation Trust, Colorado Open Lands, The Conservation Fund, and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) to identify 20 landscapes encompassing over 700,000 acres across Colorado in need of protection. Over the next decade, four organizations will direct collective private land protection efforts to these landscapes.

In this instance, the Conservancy was needed to bring organizational leadership, not science to the process. And because of a long and close history of working together, the groups already had a positive working relationship. In addition, the missions of the five groups were largely shared. The group's collective project, a map of conservation priorities, needed no new staffing, group mission creation or appointed or elected representatives. The Conservancy helped create clarity by crafting a realistic shared plan of action.

All five groups had to compare features from several data-driven maps to their real-world geographic location. What ensued was a regional outreach process that included 10 workshops with more than 175 total participants, including local land trusts, planning staff, Division of Wildlife, and agencies working with private land. The Conservancy asked: "If you were forced to choose, how would you make trade-offs? If you had \$10 million, where are the landscapes in Colorado that you would all agree to conserve?"

The group agreed to use four main criteria: (1) threats, (2) capacity, (3) political support, and (4) local funding to match state funding. The group began with fifty places, and had to cut thirty. Each partner clearly articulated what their goals were and established clear parameters from the outset. The Conservancy made sure that the strict biodiversity values need to achieve mission success were covered, but was also open to broadening the values of the group vision to include open space agriculture, scenic viewsheds, recreational resources and community cohesion.

The success of the Colorado Cooperative Priorities map was also due to the fact that there was an appropriate balance in the number of participants. Keeping the group to five large organizations, that

could then gather information from other sources, created a data and strategy cascade that helped finalize difficult decisions.

The energy of the partnership was focused on the details of the vision because the six components of a high-functioning alliance were already present: shared purpose, shared power, shared view of independence, mutual trust, shared control, and a crystal clear indicator of progress (the map).

The Colorado Cooperative Priorities map has been a powerful tool, focusing both conservation action and unprecedented levels of fundraising. It is a potent illustration of the power of successful negotiations within the structure of a formal coalition. An important success was in convening local groups to come together in consensus and work more effectively together by developing a common set of conservation priorities across a critical mass of state wide conservation organizations.