

COLORADO  
**2021 Year In Review**

CELEBRATING 55 YEARS OF CONSERVATION SUCCESS



## Dear Friends,

### The Nature Conservancy in Colorado

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ON THE COVER A mother and baby moose cross in front of bright fall colors in the San Juan mountains. © Deirdre; Denali Rosenberg/TNC Photo Contest 2021 THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM Carlos Fernandez © Lauryn Wachs/TNC; A male fox plays with his pup © Ian Murray/TNC Photo Contest 2018



Climate change has been ever-present this year as we continue to navigate a pandemic and the new normal that has come with it. From an unprecedented water shortage declaration on the Colorado River to another

season of record-breaking wildfires in the West, we are watching the impacts of climate change unfold in real time.

While it can sometimes seem that there is too much out of our control, **the most important thing each one of us can do is to act.** If enough of us join in and focus on taking action, we will find hope and solutions.

As The Nature Conservancy's chief scientist Dr. Katharine Hayhoe wrote in TIME magazine, "In the face of climate change, we must act so that we can feel hopeful—not the other way around."

Optimism is what keeps me going every day. And optimism about creating a better world, and a better future for nature and people is what brings together thousands of people around Colorado to support TNC. Thank you for being an important part of this committed group.

Together, our optimism will make a difference. We are all part of nature, and we need to defend it for its immeasurable value and to protect our own future.

I remain grateful that you stand with us. I hope as you read this report you will take pride in the accomplishments and the legacy you have helped us achieve in the past 55 years. I also hope you will be inspired by the new and innovative ways we are tackling Colorado's biggest environmental challenges.

With your steadfast support, we can be the change that the world needs. Thank you for dreaming big and keeping up your hope in our shared future!

Sincerely,



Carlos L. Fernandez

Colorado State Director



### YAMPA RIVER FUND

This year, alongside our partners, we met and surpassed our \$5-million endowment goal for the Yampa River Fund—and we did it two years ahead of schedule! This means the Fund will continue to support local projects to help boost river flows, improve recreation access, and conserve habitat on and in the Yampa River. The fund has so far awarded \$400,000 in grants to projects that have supported water releases during times of low flows, environmental restoration and agricultural infrastructure improvements.



### SUMMER INTERNS

Three of TNC's summer interns installed an infrared trail counter to study visitor use on the Yampa River Preserve near Steamboat Springs.



### SILVER MOUNTAIN

Strikingly beautiful, Silver Mountain is nestled among publicly and privately conserved lands. The protection of the mountain west of Walsenburg is one of TNC's proudest accomplishments this year. TNC purchased this 14,000-acre working cattle and bison ranch in February. It hosts a broad range of habitats for wildlife, such as elk, mountain lion, pronghorn, bighorn sheep and pinyon jay. Protecting this ranch is part of a larger vision to create a resilient and connected network of conserved land along the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo mountains stretching west into the San Luis Valley.



## Today Decides the Future

As we envision our future, we feel the urgency of today's challenges and the hope of tomorrow's solutions. With more than 55 years of conservation success across our state, The Nature Conservancy in Colorado has built a legacy of protecting nature, powered by optimism and perseverance, and grounded in science and experience.

TNC in Colorado just finished a new strategic plan that lays out our work over the next five years. The plan focuses on our most pressing challenges, such as tackling climate change, sustaining the diversity of life on Earth, and advancing a more equitable and just future.

TOP TO BOTTOM Yampa River © Raul Touzon Photography; Map © Almy; Interns © Anya Byers/TNC; Silver Mountain © Chris Pague/TNC

**➤ GO ONLINE** | To learn more about our work, visit [Nature.org/Colorado](https://www.nature.org/colorado)



# 55 YEARS

## of Conservation Results in Colorado

From our start in 1966, The Nature Conservancy has grown to be an established leader in bringing people together to tackle the big challenges for nature and people in Colorado.

Securing protection for important lands has always been central to TNC's work. We have helped protect more than 1.3 million acres of land throughout the state, starting with a wetland landscape near Crested Butte. We have played a key role in protecting and restoring diverse habitats around the state from prairie canyons to the sagebrush sea, and our work has grown to include rivers, forests, cities, policy, youth outreach, and climate action.

Our successes from the past 55 years inspire us to look ahead and dream of what we can achieve in the future. Our story is one of continual evolution and growth. With a legacy of success and a strong foundation of supporters like you, we will continue to shape the future for Colorado and beyond.



**1966** TNC protected its first preserve in Colorado—Mexican Cut. Located in the Elk Mountains near Crested Butte, Mexican Cut is an ideal outdoor laboratory. © Cynthia Weir/TNC



**1992** TNC worked with the Great Outdoors Colorado Citizens Committee to establish a trust fund that invests in the outdoors. © John Ramer/TNC Photo Contest 2019



**2008** TNC started its Forest and Fire Program, going on to directly treat more than 15,000 acres of forest through thinning and prescribed fire. TNC influences thousands more acres through forest management with private and public landowners, and through advancing key research on forest resilience and climate impacts. © Lauryn Wachs/TNC



**2020** Fishers Peak State Park opened to the public. TNC helped purchase and protect this property, along with the Trust for Public Land, GOCO, the City of Trinidad and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. © Cameron Davidson



**1987** TNC protected Phantom Canyon in the Laramie Foothills. This preserve is a spectacular 1,700-acre, roadless canyon encompassing six miles of the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River. © Joe Esparza/TNC



**1992** TNC protected High Creek Fen with the help of 10,000 pennies collected by schoolchildren in Bailey, Colorado. The preserve is the most ecologically diverse, floristically rich fen known in the Southern Rocky Mountains. © John Fielder/TNC



**1996** Twenty-five years ago, TNC purchased the Carpenter Ranch adjacent to the Yampa River Preserve, also protected by TNC. By keeping the property as a working ranch and education center, TNC shows how conservation and agriculture are able to work in tandem. © Mark Godfrey/TNC



**2004** TNC worked with residents of the San Luis Valley, the National Park Service, and elected officials to help establish Great Sand Dunes National Park. Alongside the neighboring TNC-owned Medano and Zapata Ranches, these 100,000 acres constitute the most biologically significant landscape in the state. © Nick Hall



**2008** TNC launched its Colorado River Program to address the multitude of threats and demands on the Colorado River that cross state and national borders. © Nick Hall



**2017** TNC launched its Resilient Cities program in Denver, bringing together neighbors to plant trees in the places that need them most for air quality, shade, and other health benefits. © Kevin Mohatt



**2021** TNC in Colorado dives into a new strategic plan with a focus on tackling climate change and protecting biodiversity, while elevating diversity, equity, inclusion and justice throughout our work. © Erin Reilly/TNC

**With a legacy of success and a strong foundation of supporters like you, we can continue to shape the future for Colorado and beyond.**

# Charting a Future for the Colorado River

Looking ahead, scientists predict that the Colorado River's flows could shrink by as much as 31 percent by 2050.



The Colorado River Basin—which supplies 80 percent of the water that Coloradans use—is ground zero for climate change in the United States. The Southwest is seeing a historic mega-drought, and the Colorado River's flows have declined by 20 percent over the last century.

The basin is already in uncharted territory. This summer, the Bureau of Reclamation declared a Tier 1 water shortage for the first time, triggering mandatory water cutbacks for Arizona, Nevada and Mexico in 2022.

The effects of climate change pose a huge threat to water supplies for the people, agriculture, and businesses that depend on this river, as well as the fish and wildlife. We are facing a hotter and drier future with less water to go around.

“The Tier 1 shortage declaration highlights the challenges facing the Colorado River Basin,” says Taylor Hawes, The Nature Conservancy's Colorado River program director.

The good news is that there things we can do to help the Colorado River Basin. These strategies include reducing water use, modernizing infrastructure, improving forest health, utilizing natural landscapes to minimize flood damage and both clean and store water, and improving stream and river health. We need to invest in solutions

that will not only help us better manage our water supplies in the short term, but also build climate resilience in the long term.

We've already seen these types of solutions at work. TNC has had decades of experience in the Colorado River Basin and we know firsthand how important partnerships and collaboration are in charting a sustainable and resilient future. Together, we have addressed water challenges across Colorado, such as helping create the Yampa River Fund, upgrading irrigation infrastructure on one of the largest water diversions on the Yampa River, partnering with local water utilities on forest restoration in the South Platte watershed, and working with farmers and ranchers across the state to creatively and collaboratively manage water to handle shortages.

**“We must accelerate our efforts and think more broadly and creatively than ever before to chart a sustainable course,” says Hawes.**

We must come together to create innovative, collaborative solutions that work for everyone—including farmers and ranchers, cities, Tribal Nations, outdoor recreation, and industry. It is that spirit that we must channel now more than ever to accelerate our efforts to build climate resilience in the Colorado River Basin.





# Building Resilient Cities for Nature and People

More than half of the global population lives in cities.



As the global population grows, we must find ways to live together with nature—not separately. Cities are key places to implement solutions for a more sustainable world. The planet today is more urban than it has ever been, with more than half of the global population living in cities. In the shift toward protecting our planet, cities can drive progress and become models of sustainable development and efficiency. But how can we make sure cities are part of the solution, rather than the problem?

The Nature Conservancy works to address three main challenges for Colorado’s cities—heat, sprawl, and inequity—by bringing nature-based solutions. We know that our future will be shaped by the ways we adapt our cities to a warming climate, welcome millions of new residents while still protecting natural habitats, and overcome historic inequities for people of color. To tackle these challenges, we are pursuing nature-based community resilience, urban habitat connectivity, and equitable climate action.

A central piece of our work is to look at the greater Denver area with an eye toward connecting nature and people. We are leading a seven county Regional Conservation Assessment, in partnership with the Metro Denver Nature Alliance and Biohabitats, that

will result in more protection for natural resources across the Denver metro area. The main goal is to help facilitate coordinated and collaborative planning across municipalities that emphasizes climate resilience and habitat connectivity along with increased access to nature.

To do this, we are bringing together partners for ecological planning to create a suite of tools that will identify high-priority places in the region, including habitat to protect, green spaces to connect, or degraded areas to restore. The Assessment will provide decision-makers with the information they need to understand and incorporate conservation priorities across the region. The process will help create more equitable access to nature and its benefits for all metro Denver residents and will incorporate meaningful input from diverse partners and local communities.

Our future must be one in which nature and people are connected. That means that our cities should be planned with both people and nature in mind, and with long-term outcomes and a vision to guide decisions made today. A dynamic regional vision for the Denver metro area will set us up for transformative change that leads toward a place where nature and people thrive.

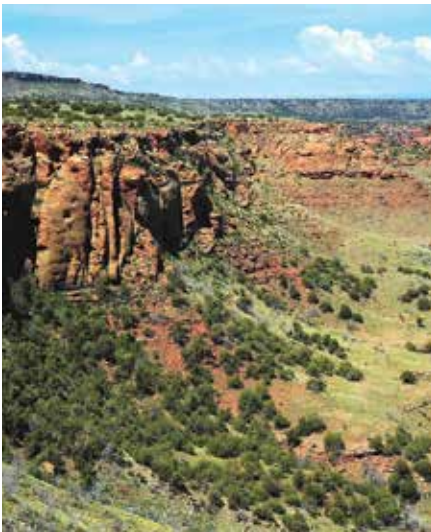






# Protecting Grasslands Across Borders

Grasslands are the world's most imperiled habitat, with only five percent of these lands protected globally.



At the intersection of five western states—Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas—lies one of the largest and most intact grasslands in North America. With this land under increasing threat from development, conversion to agriculture, and drought, we asked ourselves: how can we act to conserve this region in a way that works for nature and the people that live there?

The answer: by scaling up from a patchwork of state-based protected places to a network of connected lands. Thus, the Southern High Plains Initiative was born. Nature Conservancy staff from all five states teamed up to pursue a vision for landscape-scale conservation that transcends state borders. The aim is to accelerate the pace and scale of climate-resilient conservation, while supporting opportunities for rural communities.

**“We’re standing on the edge of some of the most dramatic conservation opportunities I’ve seen in 22 years at TNC,” says Matt Moorhead, TNC Colorado’s conservation business and partnership development advisor.**



This conservation opportunity comes at a key time in the history of land protection. Conservation efforts can—and must—scale up to meet the unprecedented challenges facing nature, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. By protecting enough habitat in the right places, we can help the world’s natural communities be more resilient to climate change and other human impacts.

To create a more climate-resilient future for plants, wildlife, and the ecosystems on which they depend, we need to protect places with a variety of habitat that supports a diversity of life now and into the future. Over the past 10 years, TNC has developed an innovative map-

THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT JE Canyon, a 50,000-acre ranch in southeast Colorado with winding sandstone canyons and a wide array of wildlife © Mike Figgs; Silver Mountain, a recent conservation success in the Southern High Plains will be conserved as a working ranch © Jason Houston; OPPOSITE PAGE Great Sand Dunes © Nick Hall; INSET TOP TO BOTTOM © Young fox © Rob Palmer; The lesser prairie chicken relies on intact grasslands and diverse plant life, so its presence often indicates that the habitat is healthy. © Alan Eckert Photography; Barber pole grasshopper © Gustavo Lozada/TNC



ping tool to identify exactly those places in the United States, called the Resilient and Connected Network.

The southeast corner of Colorado is one of the highest priority areas within the Resilient and Connected Network. This region has tremendous opportunity for conserving large, well-connected landscapes that can allow native species to move and adapt as the climate changes.

“Those high plains, the short grass, big vistas, mesas in the distance. People should spend more time there, in that quiet, windy place, and they would see the beauty in it,” says Kate Gillies, director of conservation for TNC in Oklahoma.

To protect the incredible biodiversity of Colorado and the Southern High Plains, we must work together across borders. This forward-thinking initiative is the type of transformative, locally focused effort that can get us there.

 **GO ONLINE** | To learn more about our grasslands, visit [Nature.org/Colorado](https://www.nature.org/Colorado)



# Forests of the Future:

## Using Science to Plan for the Impacts of Climate Change



### BY THE NUMBERS

**26,000**

trees planted

**250,000**

seeds dispersed

**210**

acres of burned  
forests restored

**1,050**

acres in key watersheds  
in Colorado's Front  
Range treated

**30**

people trained in forest  
restoration and fire  
management, helped  
by partners

**150,000**

acres initiated for  
planning on National  
Forest lands with the  
U.S. Forest Service

Forests benefit nature and people in so many ways. They capture much of our water supply and function as nature's reservoirs, they provide habitat for native plants and wildlife, and they support our economy through the timber and outdoor recreation industries. Yet climate change threatens Colorado's forests. While fire is a natural process, the scale and intensity of current wildfires is more extreme than we have ever experienced.

"The science is showing us there will be increases in the size, frequency, and severity of wildfires in Colorado," says Rob Addington, director of forest and fire programs. "It's going to continue to get worse, and we need to do what we can to help prepare our forests for extreme wildfire behavior."

To do this, we're treating forests *before* wildfire strikes to prevent the worst outcomes, and reforesting in places *after* wildfire has changed the landscape.

We are advancing collaborative forest restoration along Colorado's Front Range. Through the Upper South Platte Partnership, Northern Front Range Fireshed Collaborative, and Peaks to People Water Fund, we work with partners to increase the pace and scale of forest management. In addition, we work with The Ember Alliance to host fire management trainings designed to increase skills, qualifications, and experience, thereby increasing the overall forest and fire management capacity in our communities.



In landscapes that have already burned, we are focusing on reforestation. In ponderosa pine forests, for example, severe wildfires can result in scorched landscapes devoid of trees. Wind alone cannot carry the relatively heavy seeds over the vast treeless expanses left behind. That's why we are replanting trees in burned areas, targeting suitable areas where they are expected to survive under different climate models. Our focus is to speed up forest recovery. In the process, we hope to remove barriers to reforestation and support the adoption of climate-smart planting practices.

TNC is uniquely suited to effect change for our forests. It is up to all of us, working together, to make sure our forests are there for generations to come.



# Climate Action for Colorado:

## Partnering with Business Leaders for Change

The past year has set records in the United States for droughts, wildfires, floods, and high temperatures—each one serving as yet another reminder of how urgently we need climate action. TNC is tackling climate change by advancing policies at the state and federal levels, studying ways that natural climate solutions can store carbon and reduce emissions, and partnering with business leaders to advance climate action.

### Colorado Policy Wins

This year, more than 30 bills passed the 2021 Colorado legislature to advance clean buildings, environmental justice, transportation electrification, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and a just transition for fossil fuel extraction communities. This has been a huge year for our environment. TNC supported many of these efforts to help move Colorado closer to reaching its goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 50 percent by 2030 and 90 percent by 2050 (from 2005 levels). We will continue working to accelerate the pace of action for the state to make sure we will not fall behind in reaching those ambitious goals.

### Working with Businesses to Craft Solutions

The Healthy Colorado Initiative released two handbooks to help businesses and individuals reduce greenhouse gas

emissions—*Driving Change* and *Building Change*—which offer ideas to reduce the carbon footprints of commuting and buildings, respectively. This initiative is a partnership between TNC and the Colorado Forum, a group of business and civic leaders, and is dedicated to convening partners across sectors to create collaborative climate action and position Colorado as a leader in combating climate change.

“We’ve heard from many Colorado business leaders looking for ways to establish a ‘new normal’ as they re-open,” says Gail Klapper, president of the Colorado Forum. “The new guidebooks offer useful and inspiring suggestions from businesses to businesses” says Gail Klapper, president of the Colorado Forum.

### Planning for Colorado’s Future

TNC in Colorado just completed a new strategic plan for the next five years, which focuses on how all our work contributes to tackling climate change. We are conducting an analysis to advance our understanding of how natural climate solutions—such as improved management of grasslands, forests, and wetlands—can increase carbon storage on natural and working lands. The results will inform state policies, support increased funding for conservation, and refine on-the-ground management strategies



 **ONLINE** | To learn more about our work and view these guidebooks, visit [Nature.org/COclimate](https://www.nature.org/COclimate)

# 2021

## YEAR IN PICTURES

### PARTNERSHIPS TO (RE)CONNECT PEOPLE WITH NATURE

We are dedicated to reaching the next generation of stewards and making sure that children and their families from all backgrounds get to experience nature. This year, we expanded our partnerships to include supporting Outdoor Afro for a cross-country ski day at YMCA of the Rockies. © Outdoor Afro



### SILVER MOUNTAIN

One of TNC's most recent land protection projects, Silver Mountain, boasts sweeping views that can be seen from the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway. © Jason Houston



### VIRTUAL EARTH DAY

TNC's Watershed Forest Manager Catherine Schloegel (right) was interviewed by actor Justin Long for our virtual Earth Day event. They discussed the importance of planting trees to restore Colorado's burned forests. © TNC



### DOLORES RIVER

Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Bureau of Land Management staff weigh and tag fish in the Dolores River. TNC has been leading conservation efforts on the river for many years. It was critical to evaluate the fishery during 2021's historically low river flows and remove invasive fish that thrive in warmer waters. © Jason Houston



### YAMPA RIVER

The Maybell Ditch, a project on the Yampa River where TNC is helping improve infrastructure for efficiency and habitat. © Jennifer Wellman/TNC



See the latest Colorado photos! Follow us at [instagram.com/co\\_nature](https://www.instagram.com/co_nature)





### TREE PLANTING

A volunteer plants a tree in the Hayman burn scar in the Pike National Forest. This area burned so severely that trees will not return on their own in our lifetime. © Audrey Wheeler/TNC



### CAMERON PEAK FIRE

Burned forest from the Cameron Peak fire reaches the headwaters of the Colorado River. © Jason Houston



### MULE DEER

A mule deer surveys a snow-covered landscape. © Carmen Cromer/TNC Photo Contest 2021



### PHANTOM CANYON PRESERVE

A group of Denver students with the Greenway Foundation completed volunteer work at TNC's Phantom Canyon Preserve in the Laramie Foothills. © Kevin Grunewald/TNC



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**The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.**

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**LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY**



It's important to support what you believe in. For Rich and Charlotte Jorgensen, their passion for nature has turned into three decades of volunteer work and support for The Nature Conservancy. They've both served on the Board of Trustees for TNC in Colorado, and their love for Colorado runs deep.

"Colorado is so beautiful, its mountains, plains, and canyons. We're so lucky, living here, because there are so many wild places left," says Charlotte.

Rich and Charlotte are part of TNC's Legacy Club. This means they have named TNC a beneficiary of their estate plans or made other long-term gifts to TNC. On the Legacy Club, Charlotte

explains, "We wanted to be an example for our son, to show the importance of giving back to the world and to conservation. It's something to pass down to your children."

"We have been supporters for 30-plus years," Rich adds. "If you're going to be a supporter for so much of your life, it seems natural to continue on after you're gone."

TNC's thousands of Legacy Club members around the world are leaving a gift that will keep giving into the future.

The world needs all the help it can get," says Rich. "You boil it down to the country, region, state where you live, and you save what you can."

**TO PLAN YOUR CONSERVATION LEGACY** Contact Amy Baum | [amy.baum@tnc.org](mailto:amy.baum@tnc.org) | 720-974-7050

PHOTO The Jorgensens with their son Hunter © Provided by Jorgensen family