

WILDLIFE ANNUAL REPORT

2024



WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

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EVALUATING DRONES AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING ELK POPULATION COUNTS IN BOULDER COUNTY

- In 2024, wildlife staff partnered with a University of North Dakota graduate student to test drones for elk counting.
- They searched for elk near Rabbit Mountain and Red Hill, using traditional ground counts while the researcher captured drone footage.
- The study found drones provided more accurate counts, improved navigation, better viewing angles, and greater efficiency. Digital imagery also allowed for repeat counts without field challenges.



LANDSCAPE-LEVEL COORDINATION



The BCPOS Wildlife Group prioritizes habitat quality over agency boundaries. They created an environmental resources specialist role to enhance collaboration and contribute to broader planning efforts.

- Contributed to: Colorado Parks & Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Connectivity Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, and High Priority Habitat Plan.
- Supported Final Recovery Plan for Canada Lynx and the revised critical habitat rule.
- Contributed to Conservation Values Summary map for NoCo Places partnership.
- Coordinated “safety for all” U.S. 36 Corridor Project, focusing on wildlife crossings and a multi-modal bikeway.
- Acted as conservation team member for Preble’s Meadow Jumping Mouse Recovery Plan.
- Oversaw Species of Special Concern Conservation and Recovery Plans for county-designated species.

BEAVER COEXISTENCE AND MANAGEMENT

We spent much of the year tracking and responding to beavers.

- There were seven different sites with active beavers.
- We installed three different flow devices at conflict sites and discovered beavers at three new sites!
- We directed a stream bottom restoration around one of those new sites.
- We also participated in the national BeaverCON conference in October.
- We worked closely with outside partners on planning beaver habitat enhancement projects to be implemented in 2025.



New dam and lodge on St. Vrain Creek



Beaver activity and flow device at Heron Lake outlet structure

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET REINTRODUCTION EFFORT

- The black-footed ferret is North America's most endangered mammal.
- BCPOS plans to reintroduce ferrets to the Ron Stewart Preserve at Rabbit Mountain.
- 1,500 acres of prairie dog habitat are needed for three breeding pairs of ferrets; Rabbit Mountain currently has 1,409 acres.
- Prairie dogs have been vaccinated against plague since 2016.
- BCPOS aims to partner with landowners, POS groups, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to reintroduce ferrets once conditions are met.



EAGLE NEST MONITORING

We monitor seven bald eagle nests on or near county open space and share data with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies Bald Eagle Watch and Colorado Parks & Wildlife.

- The Stearns Lake nest had a mate change, but the new pair successfully raised one chick.
- After the chick fledged, lightning destroyed the nest and tree.
- The eagles searched for a new nest site and have now settled at Carolyn Holmberg Preserve.



Trail detours reduced recreation impacts on nesting eagles while still providing visitor access.



A new nest was built above an older, less stable nest used the previous year. The nest and tree collapsed after a lightning strike.

NORTHERN LEOPARD FROG HEADSTARTING AND TRANSLOCATION

- Northern leopard frogs (NLF) are a Tier 1 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Colorado.
- 2024 was our second year of partnering with the Innovation Center of the St. Vrain Valley Schools, City of Boulder Open space and Mountain Parks, and Colorado Parks & Wildlife to grow out and release (or "headstart") NLF tadpoles to help them recolonize suitable habitat.
- In fall of 2024, more than 30 adult NLF were observed at the release site, indicating that our headstarting is successful.
- In 2025, we will raise another cohort of tadpoles and continue to monitor frogs at the release site.



Northern leopard frog tadpoles in an aquarium at the Innovation Center of the St. Vrain Valley Schools



Adult Northern leopard frog observed during a visual encounter survey