



# The Field Press



A Publication of the Colorado Natural Areas Program

Volume 9, Issue 1

Spring 2007

**C**olorado Natural Areas preserve some of the finest examples of Colorado's original and unique landscapes for the benefit of present and future generations. Sites qualify as Colorado Natural Areas when they contain at least one unique or high quality feature of statewide significance:

- Native plant communities**
- Geologic formations and processes**
- Paleontological localities**
- Habitat for rare plants and animals**



Colorado State Parks

## In This Issue

From the Program Manager . . . . .	2
Friends of Natural Areas . . . . .	3
Natural Area Profile . . . . .	4
Volunteer Stewards Corner . . . . .	4
Become a Volunteer Steward. . . . .	6
John Masson's Farewell Letter . . . . .	7
Natural Areas Council . . . . .	8



Adobe Hills at Wacker Ranch. Clay-loving wild buckwheat in the foreground.  
Photo by Barbara Hawke

## CNAP and Partners Protect Colorado Endangered Wildflower on Private Land!

Hollywood couldn't have scripted it any better: an endangered wildflower that only occurs in Colorado; a parcel of private land that is threatened by real estate development and off-highway vehicles; an enthusiastic coalition of government and non-governmental groups. Unlike many stories about rare plants in Colorado, this tale has an undeniable happy ending. The Wacker Ranch, home to one of the best populations of the federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*), is now protected into the future. This story is one for the books.



Clay-loving wild buckwheat.  
Photo by Jim Reveal

### A CRITICAL PROPERTY

The 43-acre Wacker Ranch is located just outside of Montrose, Colorado, in the Adobe Hills ecosystem which supports rare plants, unique soil crusts and imperiled lichens. The Ranch is adjacent to Bureau of Land Management property, and together these parcels house one of the largest and most viable populations of clay-loving wild buckwheat in the world! CNAP, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) have been working with the landowners for years to protect the plants; but early last year, the Ranch was put on the real estate market. In an area that is growing as rapidly as Montrose, the loss of this important habitat was imminent. Decisive action was necessary to avoid the loss of this critical property....

See 'Colorado Endangered Wildflower' on page 5



**Colorado Natural Areas Program**  
**Colorado State Parks**  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 618  
Denver, Colorado 80203  
303.866.3437

[http://parks.state.co.us/  
NaturalResources/CNAP/](http://parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/)

**Bill Ritter**

*Governor*

**Harris Sherman**

*Executive Director*

*Department of Natural Resources*

**Gary Thorson and Larry Kramer**

*Acting Directors*

*Colorado State Parks*

**Colorado Natural Areas Council**

**John Masson**

*Chair*

**Kathy Yates**

*Vice Chair*

**Dr. Lee Shropshire**

*Member*

**Tyler Nifong**

*Member*

**Dennis Brinker**

*State Board of Land Commissioners*

**Dr. Tom Ready**

*Parks Board*

**Tom Burke**

*Colorado Wildlife Commission*

**Program Staff**

303-866-3203

**Rob Billerbeck** x341

*Natural Areas Program Manager*

*rob.billerbeck@state.co.us*

**Brian Kurzel** x301

*Natural Areas Coordinator*

*brian.kurzel@state.co.us*

## From the Program Manager



We are at an interesting and exciting time with the program. Harris Sherman is the Executive Director of DNR for the second time. The first time was 30 years ago when the CNAP program was started and was directly under his leadership! I have filled him in on the accomplishments of the program over that intervening 30 years and he is impressed and supportive.

We have some new opportunities to address the major concerns of our time, such as energy development and residential growth. We are working in cooperation with others via committees such as the Rare Plant Technical Committee and the Rare Plant Conservation Initiative to identify the best and most threatened rare plant areas in the state, and find innovative ways to protect these areas.

Our accomplishments in the past year include our first CNAP-owned natural area, the Wacker Ranch, which The Nature Conservancy will help us manage for 25 years while we build an endowment fund. This was a big accomplishment, and we are very thankful to all the partners on this project such as TNC, CNHP, CNE and CoNPS! We also finalized our Outreach Plan, and thanks to those that provided valuable comments. We helped with protection projects and advice on eight areas; the most notable protection projects were assisting with the stabilization of the dinosaur tracks on Dinosaur Ridge, and encouraging BLM to fence parts of Pyramid Rock to protect the rare plants there. Our staff visited 27 Natural Areas, conducted rare plant surveys on 14, held four council meetings, got two big federal grants, held two volunteer meetings, and coordinated with volunteers for visits to 60 sites. Whew!

We worked this winter on potential new designations at six sites. By next fall, we hope to have a few new natural areas designated and registered, and we hope to have some new staff! We will be adding another full-time permanent employee that will work on both Natural Areas and State Parks. We are also continuing to implement a program of inspections by park field staff and at least seven natural areas will be visited by Parks staff in 2007. Next year we hope to double that.

We also hope to coordinate with our Friends Group on some fundraising efforts in the fall. We are looking for artists and photographers and people with accounting skills to join our Friends Group and help with some fundraiser planning. Please feel free to call us and chat at any time!

*Robt. P. Billerbeck*



*Rare Thistle at  
Pyramid Rock Natural Area.*

**The CNAP Website has been revised!**

**Check out our new look and let us know what you think!  
Please visit us at: [parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP](http://parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP)**



# Friends of Colorado Natural Areas

In 2006, the Friends of Colorado Natural Areas (FCNA) supported CNAP in a variety of ways. In an exciting collaboration discussed in this newsletter (see 'Colorado Endangered Wildflower') FCNA has joined other conservation groups in a campaign to protect important habitat for an endangered plant species on the Western Slope, the clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*). FCNA has been involved with fund-raising to protect land that supports one of the few remaining occurrences of this rare plant. In particular, Friends has produced high quality photo reproductions of the clay-loving wild buckwheat that have been presented to large donors.

Other examples of FCNA activities include letter-writing and meetings with elected officials and organizations in support of Colorado's state Natural Areas. However, we would like to become even more active!

The Friends of Colorado Natural Areas would like to build our active membership in order to do more to help the Program achieve its objectives. In order for FCNA to become a more active and productive organization, the core organizational team needs to grow in membership and develop a formal structure (e.g., a board of directors).

In particular, members are needed who have skills in **fundraising** and **financial management**, and who are able to devote enough time to create a successful organization. **If you are interested in playing an active role in the Friends group, please contact Lynn Riedel or Linda Mahoney at [conaturalareasfriends@gmail.com](mailto:conaturalareasfriends@gmail.com).**

Finally, FCNA has an interest in organizing a volunteer project in a state Natural Area this year. Please contact us if you would like to help organize a field trip to protect Colorado's natural treasures! ❁

## Become an Active Member of the Friends of Colorado Natural Areas!

- o Be a part of an organizational team that helps build FCNA from the ground up! Your input will really matter!
- o Get your hands dirty and help FCNA organize a project to directly assist a Natural Area... weed control? fence building? Whatever your interest, you can help us protect a Colorado treasure.
- o Take part in an Art Auction to benefit CNAP in the Fall of 2007.



## Friends of Colorado Natural Areas Application

*I/We wish to join or renew our membership in Friends of Colorado Natural Areas!*

\$15 Individual       \$25 Family       \$8 Student or Senior

**A larger gift is greatly appreciated and will help protect individual natural areas.**

\$50       \$100       \$1000

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  Yes, I would like to be a volunteer.

**Make checks payable to:  
Friends of Colorado Natural Areas  
Mail to: Friends of Colorado Natural Areas  
PO Box 876 • Lafayette, CO • 80026**



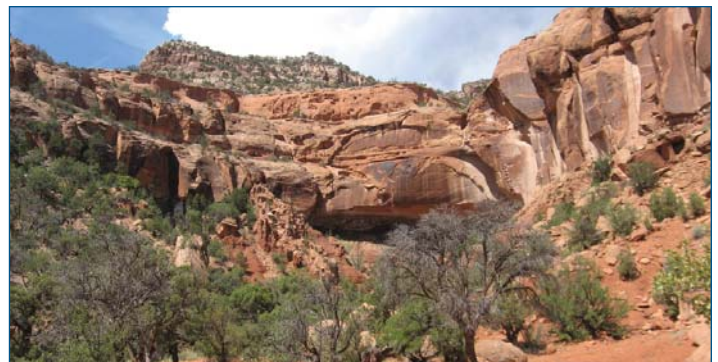
## Natural Area Profile: Escalante Canyon

**Back to the Future:** You don't need Marty McFly's DeLorean to travel through time, just visit Escalante Canyon! And why go back to 1955 when you could go back **600 million years!**? The canyon reveals a colorful 1,300 foot cross-section through the rocks representing 600 million years: see a Cretaceous Dakota Sandstone, a Jurassic Morrison Formation, a Triassic Wingate Formation and Precambrian rocks. Besides its beautiful geology, this Natural Area and BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern houses pristine native riparian plant communities and pinyon-juniper woodlands. This canyon houses a diversity of native flora and fauna enmeshed in one of Colorado's most pristine and accessible canyon ecosystems. Desert big horned sheep or elusive chukars may be sighted inhabiting the canyon.

This is a highly scenic canyon with good facilities for visitation. Popular activities (besides botanizing!) include hiking, camping, rafting, kayaking and canoeing. The boundary of the Natural Area is clearly marked with a sign, and there is a developed campground equipped with toilets, campfire grates, picnic tables and informational kiosks. Outside of the campground, camping is only allowed in signed, designated dispersed sites to protect sensitive resources. In the spring and summer, Escalante Creek

becomes very deep and fast, and swimmers should be very careful or simply avoid the creek. Diving and/or jumping into the water is prohibited year-round. Regulations are implemented to reduce the potential for damages to sensitive resources and provide for safe public recreation.

Escalante Canyon is **perfect for day visits or overnight stays**. **The canyon is easily accessed** from State Highway 50, only 15 miles northeast from Delta and 30 miles south from Grand Junction; off Highway 50, turn west onto Escalante Canyon Rd (6.5RD), and drive 10 miles to reach the Natural Area. Please no motorized vehicles off this main road, and please avoid trespassing on private lands that surround the Natural Area. You're sure to enjoy your trip 'back to the future'! ❁



## Volunteer Stewards Corner

### Accomplishments from 2006

We've said it before, but it's worth saying again: the Colorado Natural Areas Program could not be successful without Volunteer Stewards. Here are a few examples of the active role volunteers have played over the last year:

**Dave Bathke** has continued to survey for fens around Geneva Basin, providing invaluable information to both CNAP and the Forest Service. **Frank Weston** has embarked on a campaign to photograph Natural Areas for a future CNAP marketing project. **Barb Magnusson & Larry Kimball** have also contributed photography from High Mesa that is in the 2007 Colorado Weed Calendar. **Andy Herb** completed the first 'Roving Steward' project by doing wetland assessments on Antero-Salt Creek and Fourmile Creek. **Jeanne & Steve Wenger**, along with **Eric Rechel**, have worked tirelessly in assisting with the Wild Buckwheat Conservation Fund campaign. **Alix Gadd & Robert Trainor** helped with Colorado Native Plant Society field trips to Hoosier Ridge and Bonny Prairie, respectively. Thanks to all of the efforts of Volunteer Stewards in 2006... and enjoy your 2007 field season!

### Welcome to New Stewards

The following stewards have recently signed on to assist with monitoring Colorado's best places: **Ed Baker** at Ryan Gulch, **David Beaujon** at Duck Creek, **Charlie Chase** at Arikaree River, **Barbara Hawke** and **Steve Jones** at Comanche Lesser Prairie Chicken, **Paula Lehr** at Mount Emmons, **Susan Permut** at Dakota Hogback, **Marty Richardson** at Hoosier Ridge, **Sandy & Bob Righter** at Sand Creek, **Sue & Jim Schleuder** at Roxborough, **Scott Smith** at Treasurevault Mountain, **Linda Stoneman** at Raven Ridge and **Denise Wilson** at Unaweep Seep. Join me in welcoming them to our team!



*Penstemon virgatus* at High Mesa.  
Photo by B. Magnusson & L. Kimball.

## Volunteer Stewards Corner (continued)

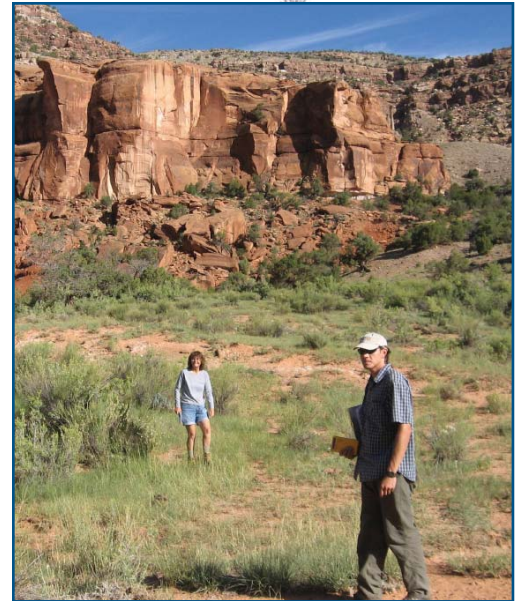
### Upcoming Events

Contact Brian (brian.kurzel@state.co.us; 303-866-3203 ext. 301) if interested in any of these events :

- You can be part of an 'elite' **rare plant monitoring** team that travels the state to perform surveys and monitoring for Colorado's rarest plants. We'll provide training and expertise if you can commit to leading monitoring field trips in coming years.
- A **Volunteer Steward gathering** will be held on the Western Slope in the fall of 2007. Details will be determined soon, but it will likely involve free food and hiking! It's a great time to see a Natural Area, meet other Stewards and find out about future projects. Contact Brian for more information.
- **Five hikes organized by the Colorado Native Plant Society** (CONPS) are focused on Colorado Natural Areas: Bonny Prairie on April 28, Fairview on May 5, Duck Creek on May 12, High Creek Fen on June 30 and Shell Rock on July 7-8. If interested, contact Brian or Steve Yarbrough from CONPS (303-250-5542). ❁

### Coming Up!!

**Don't forget! CNAP is organizing a hike for Volunteers on the Western Slope this fall. Come and see a Natural Area and meet other Stewards. Contact Brian for more information.**



Volunteer Steward Jeanne Wenger with Brian Kurzel on Escalante Canyon Natural Area

*"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature.*

*It will never fail you.*

*Frank Lloyd Wright*

## Colorado Endangered Wildflower (continued from pg. 1)

### DECISIVE ACTION

The wheels of conservation snapped into motion across the state when people learned of the impending loss of the Wacker Ranch.

- CNHP botanists confirmed the importance of this population;
- CNAP and TNC received a Recovery Land Acquisition Grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for ~\$160,000;
- The Nature Conservancy contributed match funding to secure the federal grant;
- CNAP, TNC, Center for Native Ecosystems, the Colorado Native Plant Society and Friends of Colorado Natural Areas raised over \$17,000, using such snappy slogans as "Buckwheat: it's not just for pancakes anymore!".

With such wholesale support from the conservation community and the general public, the protection of the Wacker Ranch has become a reality.

### CONSERVATION SUCCESS

As of March, 2007, the conservation community can breathe a little easier. CNAP and State Parks is now the owner of the 43-acre ranch, and TNC will manage the property for the protection of the clay-loving wild buckwheat. The land, as well as the buckwheat, will be monitored closely and access will be restricted to researchers and guided tours. CNAP will designate the Wacker Ranch Natural Area and will work closely with the BLM and TNC to secure the population that spans the property boundaries.

This story has been a notable model of how those who care about biodiversity and habitat conservation can rally around and protect Colorado's imperiled plants. Congratulations to all who worked so hard on this success story. Stay tuned, we hope this is just the first episode in a conservation mini-series that is about to unfold. ❁



A successful collaboration. From left, Rob Billerbeck of CNAP, Harold and Kathleen Wacker, and Barbara Hawke, formerly of The Nature Conservancy.

# Become a Volunteer Steward and help protect Colorado's best natural features!!

**Opportunity:** CNAP is currently looking for volunteers to monitor some of the most spectacular and sensitive areas in the state! The Natural Areas Program needs volunteers to get out and visit these sites regularly to ensure these sites are being preserved for future generations. You can help!

**Required Background / Skills:** We need volunteers who are willing and able to get to a Natural Area every year; sites may be difficult to access or close to urban areas. Most of our volunteers have graduate degrees in the natural sciences; some are experts in either botany, geology or are expert birders. However, if you consider yourself a 'naturalist' and are dedicated to getting outside and learning as much as you can, you may be a good fit. We provide extensive information and in-the-field training to get a volunteer 'up to speed' on their site.

**Responsibilities:**

- willing to visit their site at least once a year and fill out a form on the condition of the site.
- take photos (preferably digital) from the same locations each year so we have a record over time.
- A commitment to be a Volunteer Steward is for a **minimum of three years**.

Below, you'll find a list of designated Natural Areas for which we greatly need Volunteer Stewards.

SITE NAME	COUNTY	OWNER	ACRES	HIKING	ATTRIBUTES
BONNIE PRAIRIE	Yuma	Colorado State Parks	51	Easy	Little bluestem loess (wind-deposited glacial silt) prairie. State-rare 'prairie moonwort' occurs in one of the fragments.
FRUITA PALEONTOLOGICAL	Mesa	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	280	Easy	Fossil rich Jurassic outcrops with high quality preservation, completeness and abundance.
MISHAK LAKES	Saguache	The Nature Conservancy	2040	Moderate	Unusually high-quality plant communities in a series of natural playa lakes on the floor of the San Luis Valley. Migratory waterfowl depend on the wetlands.
NEEDLE ROCK	Delta	BLM	80	Moderate	Igneous rock geological exposure
RAJADERO CANYON	Conejos	BLM/State Land Board	3632	Moderate	Large populations of volcanic endemic plant in good-quality pinyon-ponderosa/Arizona fescue savanna.
SOUTH BEAVER CREEK	Gunnison	BLM	4565	Easy	Contains a Gunnison Basin endemic plant, along with Gunnison sage grouse leks.
WHEELER GEOLOGIC	Hinsdale	U.S. Forest Service	640	Difficult	A mass of volcanic pinnacles and domes. The geologic features occur within virgin forests of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir.

CNAP also has two other ways to get involved:

- **Roving Stewards** are people with special skills related to Natural Areas, for example, bird or plant identification. We are looking for people who can create species lists or geologic/paleontologic descriptions for each natural area.
- **Interpretive Stewards** lead tours of their Natural Area(s), providing information to the public about the unique attributes of the areas.



If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Brian Kurzel at 303-866-3203 x 301 or [brian.kurzel@state.co.us](mailto:brian.kurzel@state.co.us).

# John Masson's Farewell Letter

Dear Friends of CNAP,

Each generation believes theirs is the greatest, smartest, and most scientific. All great civilizations believe they know what made the world tick and how to best manage it. In my eight years with the Council, I have been humbled by how much there is to learn about the world we live in. Let me give you an example of how a simple plant can change the world.

In the late 1700s, an advanced-thinking engineer named Joshua Humphreys was chosen to design a special ship. The ship had to take on the British Royal Navy, yet the "Colonies" – the fledgling United States of America – didn't even have a Navy! Undaunted, Humphreys set about to build a new class of "Frigate" that would be sleeker, faster, shallower in draft and deadly on the high seas. The frigate was built from a type of sturdy tree the British had no access to: live oak. Early in the war of 1812, the British were astounded to see their cannonballs bouncing off the sides of the new-fangled American ship. The ship's thick wood planks were so durable, dense and resilient they resisted cannonballs at point blank range. The ship quickly acquired the nickname "Old Ironsides," although planking on the sides of the ship was made out of ancient live oaks, not iron. Still afloat 210 years later, the USS Constitution remains the oldest actively commissioned ship-of-war in the world.

Why is this example important to the Colorado Natural Areas Program? It's simple: we have the legislative charge of identifying, protecting and preserving, through voluntary cooperative agreements, those things that make Colorado unique. While we don't have ancient live oak trees, we do have lots of scientifically critical and aesthetically important areas in Colorado. For example: 3,000 year-old living trees, carnivorous plants, iron fens, world class fossil beds, rare and globally significant plants, and geologic formations that give mute testimony to our past and perhaps, our future.

A current example that CNAP and Council is involved with: A unique plant was discovered in 1986 on Mount Callahan, on the western slope of Colorado. Occidental Petroleum Corporation owns the land where this plant, *Penstemon debilis* or, Parachute penstemon, is found. Despite extensive searches of the vast oil shale area, this plant is nowhere to be found except in one tiny nearby BLM parcel and around Mount Callahan. It is globally significant because it is found nowhere else on Earth. The Parachute penstemon has only been found on steep oil shale slopes, in places where researchers sometimes have to rope themselves in to keep from sliding off thousand foot cliffs. Soil is practically nonexistent and the plants seem to grow right out of the shale rubble. But here grows this beautiful, greenish-olive plant, growing in clusters about the size of your fist. It looks exotic, as though it might come from an alien world. Some rare plants look like, well, weeds, but this plant is special.

No one has unlocked the secrets of this plant: how long it has lived here, how does it survive while other plants perish or never take root? We like to think we're smart and have the scientific answers, but particularly in this case, we don't. Could this plant have the cure for Parkinson's disease? Perhaps biochemists will one day discover that this plant actually harvests energy from the shale and will unlock a new, environmentally friendly process of extracting kerogen (oil) from oil shale.

In 1987, Occidental signed Articles of Designation, creating the Mount Callahan Natural Area to protect and preserve the *Penstemon debilis*. Now that conventional oil and gas drilling is on the front burner, the plant's existence is potentially in jeopardy. CNAP staff and the Council have been working closely with Occidental to continue to enhance their conservation efforts. Perhaps we can actually increase the Natural Area to include more of the plant's limited growing territory on Mount Callahan. We are hopeful that a new agreement will be signed in the coming year.

I have been honored to work with the professionals who make up the CNAP staff and Council members. The past eight years have seen the program go from the most severe financial challenges to one of continued support and increased funding. In 2008, CNAP will celebrate its 30th year since the Colorado Legislature created the program and Council. There remains much critical work to be done, but I'm confident that those running the program are up to the task. May the great mysteries of our world continue to be preserved and revealed with their help.

Sincerely,

John Masson

Outgoing Colorado Natural Areas Council Chair



# Natural Areas Council News

The Fall 2006 Council meeting was highlighted by several awards and presentations. Randy Frank of Jefferson County and Joe Temple of Dinosaur Ridge were presented with the Governor's certificate for the Designation of Dinosaur Ridge/Dakota Hogback Natural Area. Colorado Natural Heritage Program botanist Dave Anderson was presented with a certificate of appreciation for his work on the Council from 2004 to 2006. Dave then discussed his surveys for the boat-shaped bug seed, *Corispermum navicula*, at East Sand Dunes Natural Area in Jackson County. The boat-shaped bug seed is only found in Colorado and Dave found merely the second known population in the world! Finally, Steve Kettler of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife, gave a presentation on efforts to conserve rare plants of the Arkansas River valley.

The Spring 2006 Council meeting resulted in the Council voting to designate the Wacker Ranch Natural Area and register the Staunton Natural Area on Staunton State Park.

The Colorado Natural Areas Council (CNAC) would like to welcome the newest appointee, Tyler Nifong of Castle Rock. We anticipate Tyler's contributions to the Council, and look

forward to working with him. At the end of June, chairman John Masson and member Dennis Brinker will be moving on after completion of their tenure (see John's farewell letter on page 5).

Check the CNAC website ([parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/CNAPCouncil/](http://parks.state.co.us/NaturalResources/CNAP/CNAPCouncil/)) for the dates and location of upcoming Council meetings. If you are interested in attending any of these meetings, please contact Brian Kurzel (303-866-3203 x 301).

## Go Paperless!

If you'd like to receive the Colorado Natural Areas Program newsletter **by e-mail only**, please e-mail us at: [brian.kurzel@state.co.us](mailto:brian.kurzel@state.co.us)

In the subject or body of the e-mail please state:  
**"Newsletter via e-mail only"**

If you want to continue getting paper newsletters, there is no need to contact us.

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Denver, Colorado  
Permit No. 738

Colorado Natural Areas Program  
Colorado State Parks  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 618  
Denver, Colorado 80203  
341200300

