

THE COLORADO COLLEGE

# STATE OF THE ROCKIES PROJECT

Research • Report • Engage



## **The State of the Rockies Project 2013-14 Prospectus:**

### **Large Landscape Conservation in the Rockies:**

### **Exploring New Conservation Paradigms for the 21st Century**

**May 20, 2013**

#### **Establishing a New Rockies Project Approach to Large Landscapes**

Building upon two years of focus on a very large conservation area in the Rockies: the Colorado River Basin, we return during 2013-14 to an analysis of the eight state region's land and environment. We will apply new techniques of "creative conservation" and "large landscape conservation" to provide comprehensive insight into innovative conservation actions and tools in the region. Using tabular and spatial techniques, a detailed inventory of Rockies' conservation efforts/initiatives will be created. To highlight these important transformations in the conservation arena and the efforts already underway to further conservation in the Rockies, we will address the topic through a three-pronged approach that includes investigation on a regional scale, on a case-specific basis, and the incorporation of social and visual media through a field expedition to raise awareness of the issues surrounding conservation in the Rockies.

#### **Bringing a Greater Understanding to the Rockies' Conserved Lands through GIS**

The first initiative of the Project's work is a GIS-based catalog of the Rocky Mountain Region's varied land ownership and management. Through the creation of a comprehensive database (including GIS locations) for the public and major private lands and their conservation status, we aim to bring a better spatial understanding of the region's rich and varied land ownership and management. We will assess for each entry a variety of dimensions, including: context for creation, current ownership/management, relevant governance, participation with adjacent and regional conservation efforts, and protective tools in use/anticipated. Rockies Project student researchers during summer 2013 will construct this tabular and spatial database as the research foundation for their specific analytical sections. By examining the land ownership of different agencies, both federal and state, and the role conservation plays in the management of those lands, we seek to bring a better spatial understanding of the region's conserved lands. In addition to this, we will also seek to highlight the growing role of private landowners in the conservation arena and further the spatial understanding of these landscape conservation initiatives where possible.

## **Detailed Investigating of Large Landscape Conservation Initiatives in the Rockies**

Our second initiative will directly address key landscape conservation efforts underway in the Rockies by creating case studies that capture the many different initiatives underway and the various approaches at work to further conservation in the Rockies. By cooperating with the University of Montana's Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy, we plan to build upon their work that catalogs Large Landscape Conservation initiatives already underway in the 8-state mountain region. In addition to identifying these initiatives that are already underway, we also plan to develop robust case studies investigating specific conservation efforts already underway. By applying a common template to all of our case studies, highlighting different elements of management, cooperation, and other attributes, we plan to investigate the different practices being implemented throughout the region. Our work will be coordinated with the [Practitioners Network for Large Landscape Conservation](#).

## **Spine of the Rockies Expedition: Reporting on Large Landscape Conservation in the Rockies**

Our third aspect of the Project, focusing on Large Landscape Conservation initiatives underway in the Rockies will be our 2013 Spine of the Continent Expedition. By travelling to a number of key large landscape conservation areas and leveraging the region's strong ties to outdoor recreation, we hope to further awareness of these conservation efforts through traditional and emerging media. Areas of focus for this summer's field expedition work will include: Thompson Divide in Colorado, the Sangre de Cristo Conservation Area in Colorado, the Greater Yellowstone region in Wyoming and Montana, the Crown of the Continent in Montana and Alberta, and the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. Our expedition team will split their efforts between capturing the natural beauty of these areas through extended time in the backcountry and interviewing key stakeholders involved in conservation work to highlight the human element of the region's conservation work. Through blogs, photography, and the production of a video series, we seek to engage a greater audience in the discussion of Large Landscape Conservation even as we contribute to "citizen science" data for regions explored. The expedition will utilize the online database iNaturalist to catalog wildlife observations in order to further the breadth and scope of scientific data in these areas of key conservation importance. To view the Rockies Project's iNaturalist observations [click here](#).

## **Researching, Reporting, and Engaging Rockies Citizens on Large Landscape Conservation**

While it is hard to define exactly what constitute Large Landscape Conservation areas and efforts, there is growing consensus that such areas and efforts are: multijurisdictional; multipurpose; multi-stakeholder; operating at various geographical scales; and involving a variety of governance arrangements. These elements make clear that a key dimension to successful large landscape management and conservation is the ability to work across boundaries – physical, political and social. The Rockies Project has made great strides over the last decade to tie together the many dynamic and complex issues of topics of great concern to our beautiful, yet fragile region. By drawing together a better understanding of the region's conserved lands, investigating specific conservation initiatives, and utilizing on-the-ground reporting through our expedition, we seek to achieve the same goal for Large Landscape Conservation in the Rockies.