THE COLORADO COLLEGE
2013-14
State of the Rockies Project:
LARGE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION IN THE ROCKIES:
EXPLORING NEW CONSERVATION PARADIGMS FOR
THE 21ST CENTURY
SUMMER FIELD WORK 2013
The State of the Rockies Project continued its tradition of student-faculty collaborative research during the summer of 2013. Throughout the 10 years of the Project, field research has remained a crucial component of our investigations. As the Project’s topic and geographic focus have changed over the years, so have our journeys into the field to meet with experts in various fields. For the summer of 2013, with our focus on Large Landscape Conservation, we set our sights northward. With stops like Yellowstone, Bozeman, Missoula, and the Flathead River Valley, this year’s field work involved meetings with conservation experts, and individuals tied to the past, present, and future of land use and conservation here in the Rocky Mountain West. In addition to our 3,400 mile journey from Colorado Springs to the Canadian Border, our team also conducted field research in Colorado’s Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and the Front Range of Colorado.

By continuing the Project’s tradition of getting our researchers out on the ground, interacting with stakeholders, and engaging experts on the various dimensions of complex environmental and socioeconomic issues, the Project has once again invested in a research approach that helps to develop our student researchers into invested leaders in the Rocky Mountain community. Additionally, the field work of the Project continues to establish Colorado College as an institution devoted to the region’s peoples and environment, and greatly benefits the Rockies Project’s mission of making Rocky Mountain issues more clearly visible to the region’s residents.
On June 26th and 27th, the Rockies Project student research team met up with our Spine of the Continent Expedition to explore some of the innovative large landscape conservation work underway just a few hours from Colorado Springs. Traveling south, the group visited the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the adjacent San Luis Valley to meet with experts regarding the recently formed Sangre de Cristo Conservation Area. The conservation initiative, a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private landowners, greatly helps to increase wildlife habitat connectivity between federal, state, and private lands. Additionally, our student research team took advantage of the region’s extensive public lands and climbed Colorado’s third highest summit, Blanca Peak. From the top of the mountain, our team was able to get a 14,000-foot perspective on this important conservation initiative in Colorado College’s own backyard.
Beginning our two-week field research trip to the Northern Rockies, our research team drove north to Jackson, Wyoming to begin meetings with experts in the region. Meetings with the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance (JHCA) Executive Director and Wildlands Program Director gave our student researchers insight into the conservation work being conducted in the community. In addition to discussions regarding work in the community, the JHCA was also able to lend some insight into the larger initiatives being undertaken in the region, particularly the work being conducted in the Greater Yellowstone Ecoregion. On the evening of July 15th, the research team set their sights on an ambitious goal: to summit the Grand Teton, the iconic peak of the Jackson Hole area.
On July 16th, after a night spent camping at 12,000-feet, our student research team set out for the summit of the Grand Teton, hoping to avoid the infamous inclement weather of the Teton Range. As the sun rose and our team reached the Lower Saddle of the mountain, they were disappointed to look out towards the west, into Idaho, and see grey clouds and morning rain storms. Not wanting to risk a summit attempt with the ensuing weather, our team was turned back at the Lower Saddle and began the trip back to the valley floor.

Heading north from the Tetons and into Yellowstone, the team was treated to all of the wonders of the iconic National Park. Encountering bison, geysers, and the park’s many summertime visitors, our student researchers gained insight into the National Park Service and their long history of large landscape conservation.
Bozeman, Montana: July 17th & 18th

Continuing further into the Northern Rockies, our Project research team spent two days in Bozeman, Montana meeting with various experts and conservation organizations. The town’s large non-profit and environmentally-minded community proved to be a great resource for the Project’s focus on large landscape conservation. Meetings with the Gallatin Community Collaborative, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, American Rivers, and the Center for Large Landscape Conservation were of great assistance in the team’s research on specific conservation initiative case studies and the broader topic of landscape conservation.
Venturing further north and east into Montana, the research team was able to take in the sights of Central Montana before additional meetings in the Malta, Montana area. A night spent camping on the West Fork of the Boulder River and travelling through the community of Livingston showed our researchers the importance of the area’s abundant public lands and the many recreational opportunities that help to support local economies.

Another night spent along the Missouri River near the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge brought the researchers closer to northeastern Montana and the contentious issues of bison reintroduction and private conservation.
On July 21st and 22nd, the research team dove deep into the work of the American Prairie Reserve (APR), south of Malta, Montana, and some of the local resistance to the private land conservation initiative seeking to restore a native prairie habitat. The APR’s unique location on some of the last remaining intact native prairie, its close proximity to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, and its place near the generations-old ranching communities of Phillips County all provided our research team with an interesting perspective on private conservation. Sitting down with the Director of the local Stockmen’s Association provided our team with an opposing stance to the Reserve’s reintroduction of bison to traditional rangelands. A final meeting with U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials at the Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge taught the researchers about the importance of conservation cores and the important role that the refuge plays in the conservation of many of Montana’s wildlife species.
Travelling west from Montana’s eastern plains, the research team set its sights on the community of Ovando and the Blackfoot River valley. The area is home to one of the most successful large landscape conservation initiatives in the Rocky Mountain West, the Blackfoot Challenge. A unique collaboration between private landowners and businesses, and state and federal agencies has resulted in a management program that balances the natural treasures of the area and its long history of working landscapes. Meetings with officials from the Challenge gave the research team some insight into their management strategies that aim for community collaboration to address issues in the valley. Later in the day, a meeting with the local Bureau of Land Management Field Manager, a board member on the Challenge, also highlighted the unique relationship between the conservation initiative and federal agencies.
Swinging south to the state capitol, Helena, the research team met with experts from the University of Montana’s Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and the Co-Director of the Crown of the Continent Roundtable. The Roundtable represents a new approach to large landscape conservation that has pulled together many diverse organizations from around northern Montana and southern Alberta and British Columbia to preserve the region’s natural heritage. In addition to discussing the intricacies of many of the conservation initiatives in the Northern Rockies, our team also discussed some of the cooperation between our two organizations to contribute to the growing Practitioners Network for Conservation. The development of case studies and an investigation of best conservation practices will help to make the Network a valuable resource for other conservation initiatives across the Rockies region and the country.

Venturing north from Helena, the student research team traveled to the shores of Flathead Lake and the Flathead Indian Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). Meeting with the Director of Tribal Services, the researchers were introduced to the progressive conservation initiatives being undertaken on tribal land. The Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness, the first of its kind in the country, has stood as an example of the tribe’s commitment to preservation of wild lands on the Reservation since 1979. The CSKT are also a key participant in the Crown of the Continent Roundtable and its work to conserve the greater region.
Glacier National Park, Montana: July 26th

After finishing the final meeting of the research trip with Tribal Officials on the Flathead Reservation, our researchers headed further north to visit Glacier National Park. The Park sits in the middle of the region known as the Crown of the Continent and is an important conservation area for the region’s keystone species, the grizzly bear. Hiking at the top of the Park’s famous Going to the Sun Road at Logan Pass, the team was treated to sightings of mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and marmots. Having travelled nearly to the Canadian border, the team turned south and made the long haul back to Colorado Springs to return to campus and finish the Project’s summer work to be published in the 2014 State of the Rockies Report Card.
One final field research trip during the summer of 2013 brought our student researchers to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge outside of Denver. Researching a new landscape conservation initiative on Colorado’s Front Range, the Rocky Mountain Greenway, our team met with officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Colorado. The new project aims to develop a trail system connecting the Refuge with Rocky Mountain National Park to the northwest.
Colorado College State of the Rockies Project

Students Researching, Reporting, and Engaging:
The Colorado College State of the Rockies Report Card, published annually since 2004, is the culmination of research and writing by a team of Colorado College student researchers. Each year a new team of students studies critical issues affecting the Rockies region of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

Colorado College, a liberal arts college of national distinction, is indelibly linked to the Rockies. Through its Block Plan, students take one course at a time, and explore the Rockies and Southwest as classes embark in extended field study. Their sense of “place” runs deep, as they ford streams and explore acequias to study the cultural, environmental, and economic issues of water; as they camp in the Rocky Mountains to understand its geology; as they visit the West’s oil fields to learn about energy concerns and hike through forests to experience the biology of pest-ridden trees and changing owl populations. CC encourages a spirit of intellectual adventure, critical thinking, and hands-on learning, where education and life intertwine.

The Colorado College State of the Rockies Project dovetails perfectly with that philosophy, providing research opportunities for CC students and a means for the college to “give back” to the region in a meaningful way. The Report Card fosters a sense of citizenship for Colorado College graduates and the broader regional community.

Research
During summer field work, the student researchers pack into a van and cover thousands of miles of the Rocky Mountain West as they study the landscape, interview stakeholders, and challenge assumptions. Back on campus, they mine data, crunch numbers, and analyze information.

Report
Working collaboratively with faculty, the student researchers write their reports, create charts and graphics, and work with editors to fine-tune each Report Card section. Their reports are subjected to external review before final publication.

Engage
Through a companion lecture series on campus, the naming of a Champion of the Rockies, and the annual State of the Rockies Conference, citizens and experts meet to discuss the future of our region. Additionally, the development of new Project initiatives that focus on web and emerging media have broadened the Projects reach through a State of the Rockies Blog, multiple video series, and a greater social media presence.

Each Report Card has great impact: Media coverage of Report Cards has reached millions of readers, and the 2006 report section on climate change was included in a brief presented to the U.S. Supreme Court. Government leaders, scientists, ranchers, environmentalists, sociologists, journalists, and concerned citizens refer to the Colorado College State of the Rockies Report Card to understand the most pressing issues affecting the growing Rockies region.
The State of the Rockies Project would like to thank the following organizations and agencies for assisting in our 2013 summer research and field work:

[Logos of various organizations listed]