

# Conserving Plants on Private Lands in Colorado



*Dudley Bluffs bladderpod / Gina Glenne*

## Why are plants important?

Plants perform critical roles in our environment and society. Plants are the foundation of most ecosystems, and they provide essential services including supplying the air we breathe, cleaning the water, controlling floods, providing food for most life on the planet, and playing a

major role in the regulation of the world's climate. In addition, plants produce fibers, timber, medicines and the fuel for our economies which sustain our society. Through history, humans have used about 3,000 plants for food and an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 plants for folk medicines worldwide. The majority of our modern day prescription drugs were originally derived from plants. In Colorado, at least six percent of our rarest plants contain active chemicals that may prove valuable to humans. Plants are an important part of both our human and natural heritage and they beautify the world



*Parachute beardtongue / Creed Clayton*



*Penland alpine fen mustard habitat / Alicia Langton*

## Why are rare plants threatened?

Because plants cannot get up and move, they are particularly vulnerable to threats. These threats include habitat destruction from urban and rural development; oil, gas, and mineral development; nonnative plant invasions (weeds); overuse by livestock; recreation impacts (especially off-road vehicle use), and the potential effects climate change. Other threats include collection (especially in the case of cacti and orchid species), disease, and predation. In addition, because many rare plant species are limited to small, isolated populations, they are especially vulnerable to habitat modification.

## What are the protections for plants under the Endangered Species Act?

Typically there are no special provisions for conserving plants on private lands. Plants receive fewer protections than animals under the Act. Plants are protected only on Federal lands or on private lands where Federal funds or permits are used. If Federal funds are used or permits are required, actions on private lands may require consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This consultation process may lead to project modifications but will not prevent a project. Protections for species generally apply for the length of a funding agreement.



*Pagosa skyrocket / Alicia Langton*

Unlike many other states, there is no State law in Colorado that protects plants, except for the state flower, the Rocky Mountain columbine. The Rocky Mountain columbine is not protected under the Act.

**What can you do to help conserve plants on private lands?**

If you think you may have a plant that is protected by the Act (“listed”) on your property, technical and financial assistance may be available. Surveys can be conducted to determine if you have a threatened or endangered plant on your land. We can work with private landowners to develop cooperative solutions that may include appropriate management of grazing, fencing, weed control, or land protection such as conservation easements or even land acquisition.

More specific funding sources and conservation actions are listed below:

- Recovery Land Acquisition Grants are available for conservation easements as well as land acquisition that may help landowners take advantage of tax incentives. For example, we have worked to establish a reserve at Wacker Ranch for clay-loving wild buckwheat.
- Our Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is able to provide financial and technical assistance to achieve voluntary habitat restoration and protections. For example, we have worked to install protec-

tive fencing for clay-loving wild buckwheat and Pagosa skyrocket.

- Tax credits are available to landowners with over 40 acres that are working to conserve threatened and endangered species on their lands.
- We can work to develop conservation agreements, conservation banks, and management plans for these species.
- We can help you meet your land management goals while also protecting rare species. For example, we have supported the Colorado Natural Areas Programs efforts to protect plants on lands owned by energy companies.



*Penland beardtongue / Ellen Mayo*

- We can put you in touch with other agencies and entities such as the Colorado Natural Areas.
- Program or the Colorado Rare Plant Conservation Initiative that are working to conserve Colorado’s rare plants.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Colorado Ecological Service Office  
(303) 236-4005**

**Western Colorado Ecological Services Office  
(970) 243-2778  
<http://www.fws.gov/coloradoES/>**

**A map and list of threatened and endangered plants in Colorado is available at the website.**

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