



Natural Resources

During the 2017 legislative session, the General Assembly considered a variety of measures related to natural resources. These topics were wide-ranging and encompassed the operation of the division of Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), water pollution, and forest health. Bills about endangered species conservation and a seaplane program were also considered.

State Parks Access and Funding

Senate Bill 17-073 encourages CPW, the City of Pueblo, and the Pueblo Conservancy District to work with other stakeholders to engage in a long-term process to promote the beneficial development and maintenance of the Runyon-Fountain State Wildlife Area. This includes development and implementation of a multi-party master plan, exploration of funding sources, and a consideration of options to facilitate operation of the area. CPW and the Pueblo Conservancy District are required to report their progress to the General Assembly by March 1, 2018.

CPW funding. The majority of funding for wildlife programs in CPW comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, habitat stamps, and park passes. The remaining funding comes from an excise tax on the sale of firearms and ammunition products; Great Outdoors Colorado grants; federal and state grants; sales, donations, and interest; and severance taxes. A fishing and small game combination license is currently \$41, and fees for big game licenses range from \$30 to \$250.

Current law limits the amount of revenue that CPW can generate through user fees. Due to an increase in the sales of parks passes and hunting and fishing licenses, CPW revenues has met the imposed revenue cap.

House Bill 17-1321, which was postponed indefinitely, would have increased the limit for fees set in rule by the CPW Commission. Additionally, the bill would have created an aquatic nuisance sticker and fee schedule to fund the Aquatic Nuisance Species program in the Department of Natural Resources. The bill would have also made changes to penalties for violations of CPW laws, including:

- increasing the penalty for certain wildlife violations to twice the cost of the most expensive license for the affected species;
- creating a new misdemeanor for hunting and fishing without a license and for engaging in a regulated activity without the required permit, pass, or sticker; and
- creating a class 2 petty offense for operating a vessel without an aquatic nuisance species sticker after January 1, 2018.

House Bill 17-1374, which was deemed lost, would have required CPW to offer to veterans, free of charge, a lifetime resident combination small game hunting and fishing license, or any big game license the person qualified for under the rules of the CPW Commission. Qualifications for the free license included that the person be a resident of Colorado for at least

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two years and served on active duty in the United States military for at least two years.

Seaplanes

Current CPW rules prohibit seaplanes from landing in or taking off from state park bodies of water. *Senate Bill 17-235*, which was postponed indefinitely, would have required CPW to create a pilot project that allowed seaplanes to land on at least two lakes located at different state parks. The lakes included in the pilot program were at the discretion of the CPW Commission, and CPW had the right to control the use of the water for seaplanes. The bill included several requirements regarding the Aquatic Nuisance Species program in the Department of Natural Resources, including requirements that the pilot of a seaplane:

- be certified in aquatic nuisance species identification, inspection, and decontamination;
- land the seaplane at a specific Colorado airport for inspection and decontamination; and
- communicate with park personnel where the seaplane would land.

State Forest Health

Current law authorizes two grant programs relating to forest management. The Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program is administered by the Department of Natural Resources and is financed by a one-time transfer of \$1 million from the General Fund. The Forest Health Restoration Program Cash Fund is administered by the Colorado State Forest Service in Colorado State University and is financed through annual transfers of \$1 million from the Severance Tax Operational Fund. Those transfers expired on July 1, 2016.

Senate Bill 17-050 consolidates the two existing funds and creates The Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health Grant Program. Additionally, the bill authorizes transfers from the Severance Tax Operational Fund from

July 1, 2017, to September 1, 2023, to the Wildfire Risk Reduction and Forest Health Grant Program Cash Fund.

Recreational Trails

Senate Bill 17-100 strengthens existing legal protections under the federal Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 and Colorado's Volunteer Service Act for individual volunteers and nonprofit entities who build or maintain recreational trails and related facilities pursuant to grants received under the Colorado Recreational Trails System Act. The bill provides immunity from civil liability for volunteers for any act or omission that results in damage or injury if the volunteer was acting within the scope of land stewardship activities and duties under a grant. The Colorado Parks and Wildlife Trails Program issues grants for a variety of activities, including technical assistance and training on trail design, development, and maintenance. Recipients include local, county, state, and federal government agencies, special recreation districts, and nonprofit organizations.

Species Conservation Trust Fund

The Species Conservation Trust Fund was created in 1998 to help protect and recover threatened and endangered species. Each year, the executive director of the Department of Natural Resources prepares a species conservation eligibility list after consulting with the Colorado Water Conservation Board and CPW. The list describes programs intended to accomplish the goals set out in statute and associated costs eligible for funding. *Senate Bill 17-202* appropriates \$3.85 million from the Species Conservation Trust Fund for these programs. Programs that received funding through the bill are: the Native Aquatic Wildlife Conservation program; the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program; and the Upper Colorado River Recovery program; among others.