



THE  
**NEXT  
COLORADO**

**ENSURING ACCESS TO PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS  
FOR GROWING AND DIVERSE POPULATIONS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Colorado's population is experiencing rapid growth, putting increased pressures on the state's public lands, which are beloved by the vast majority of its residents, a significant driver in the state's economy and a main draw for people moving to the state. Additional threats from development and a movement to sell off these lands to the highest bidder – closing them to the American public – are putting Colorado at risk of losing the wild.

A summary of findings include:

- **Population Growth:** Since 1990, Colorado has added more than 2.1 million residents – a 65 percent population increase. By 2040, it is projected to have increased by 136 percent from 1990.
- **Shifting Demographics:** Latinos make up approximately 19 percent of the state's population – an increase of nearly 140 percent since 1990. By 2040, more than one-third of Colorado's population will be Latino – an astounding growth of 525 percent from 1990.
- **Lack of Existing Protections:** While population growth reaches new highs, only 10 percent of Colorado's total land is currently under permanent protection jeopardizing long term accessibility of to natural areas as development expands outward.
- **Oil and Gas Development:** Ongoing discussions and attempts to lease public lands for oil and gas development that would be detrimental to the quality and future of many treasured locations.
- **Anti-parks Movement:** Continual attempts from the U.S. Congress seek to privatize federal lands, which would result in restricted access or loss of habitat, and to weaken or eliminate the Antiquities Act, a presidential tool responsible for the protection of many of Colorado's treasured wild spaces and important cultural sites.

Opportunities for Colorado to ensure these lands remain intact for future generations exist:

- **Protecting New Areas:** With only 10 percent of Colorado's public lands permanently protected, there is significant opportunity to add to that portfolio. There are several current federal and local efforts underway.
- **Creating Safeguards:** Master leasing plans provide a framework to ensure that areas under consideration for leasing meet criteria to reduce the environmental impact. Consistent adoption and use is needed.
- **Engaging Growing Communities:** Embracing Colorado's shifting demographics would engage new audiences such as Latinos and millennials in the state's conservation efforts. There is a demonstrated concern from these communities, but their potential has been relatively untapped.

The protection of Colorado's public lands is necessary for the quality of life and public health benefits that is helping drive the population boom. If these lands are not protected now, future generations will suffer a lack of access to our great outdoors.

# INTRODUCTION

As twenty-year-old Diana Luna, a Metropolitan State University of Denver student, stood in the Oval Office and shook the president's hand, she knew that her advocacy to protect public lands in Colorado was important and she felt proud of her and others involvement to make the Browns Canyon area a National Monument.

Three years prior to meeting the President as part of the celebration following the designation, Luna joined more than 30 Latino youth on a trip to Browns Canyon, located about two and a half hours southwest of Denver, for a weekend of camping and whitewater rafting. At the time, Browns Canyon was one of the country's few remaining unprotected wilderness areas – one that had been degraded by illegal roads and other developments leading to erosion and habitat destruction. The trip left an impression on many of the youth, and they vowed to take action to protect the land.

Upon returning home, a dozen of the youth began to raise funds to finance a trip to Washington, D.C. In a matter of weeks, they arrived in the nation's capitol and shared their experience with the National Park Service, Department of Interior, the President's Council for Environmental Quality and their elected officials. The youth expressed their concern over Browns Canyon and their desire to see it protected for future generations.

As time went by, Luna never forgot that experience and continued to push for the area's protection. In December 2014, she returned to Browns Canyon to voice her support at U.S. Senator's Michael Bennet and Mark Udall's public meeting with the Obama administration. She spoke up, represented her community and encouraged protection of Browns Canyon as a national monument.

In February 2015, President Obama designated 28,586 acres of federal public lands in Browns Canyon as a national monument, thus permanently protecting its watersheds, critical habitat for threatened or endangered species, biological diversity and scenic beauty and strengthening outdoor access and recreation opportunities.

For Luna, the entire process had a profound effect not just on her career future – she changed her college focus to political science – but also on her understanding of the importance of engaging the Latino community and the strong support it holds for Colorado's public lands.

While the multi-year effort ultimately led to the permanent protection of Browns Canyon, it



Upper: Diana Luna meets President Obama in the Oval Office.

Above: Luna (right) shows her support for Browns Canyon at the U.S. Forest Service public meeting.

As our nation celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the National Park Service, its important for Colorado to explore ways to ensure that public lands access remains into the future - a future that will continue to see major growth in its population and diversity in those seeking to enjoy our parks.

underscores the long uphill battle those wanting to see a balance between development and conservation face. And not only is the fight being waged to bring new areas under protection, but it's also being fought against lands that are seemingly protected – public lands that are jeopardized by developments in close proximity.

Dinosaur National Monument, which straddles both Colorado and Utah in the northwest part of the state, has been threatened by attempts to lease land for oil and gas development. Colorado's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intended to lease land that would have placed oil extraction facilities adjacent to the park and along two of its entrance roads. Public outcry and concerns from the National Park Service halted the plans and led to the development of a master leasing plan (MLP). The MLP released in 2015 keeps development away from Dinosaur National Monument for now, but it does open up other sensitive areas – those considered by many to be “too wild to drill” like Thompson Divide – to oil and gas developments. The Thompson Divide is one of the largest unprotected roadless networks in the west, but 81 land leases are currently being held by the oil and gas industry and the infrastructure necessary to facilitate drilling would destroy the region.

Another example is Mesa Verde National Park, located in the southwest corner of the state. Again, the BLM proposed leasing public lands near the national park. Home to famous Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings, the area is already threatened by poor air quality, which would only be exacerbated by oil and gas drilling in its proximity. An effort to establish an MLP for southwest Colorado is currently underway and is being supported by a variety of stakeholders.

As many strive to protect the state's public lands, Colorado is undergoing significant changes from population growth and shifting dynamics to increased focus on energy development.

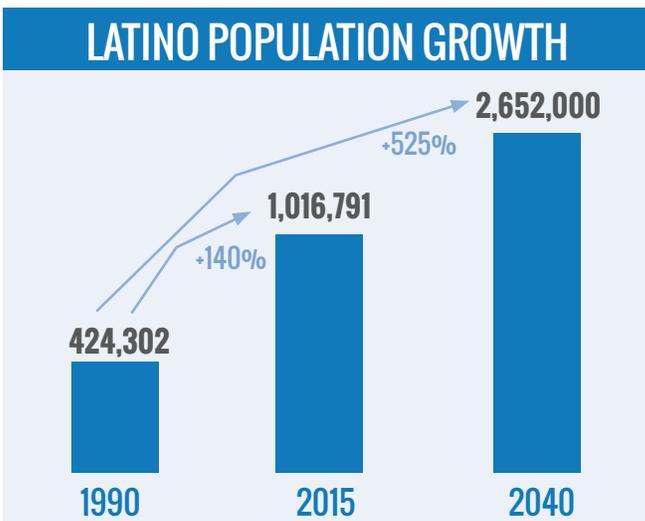
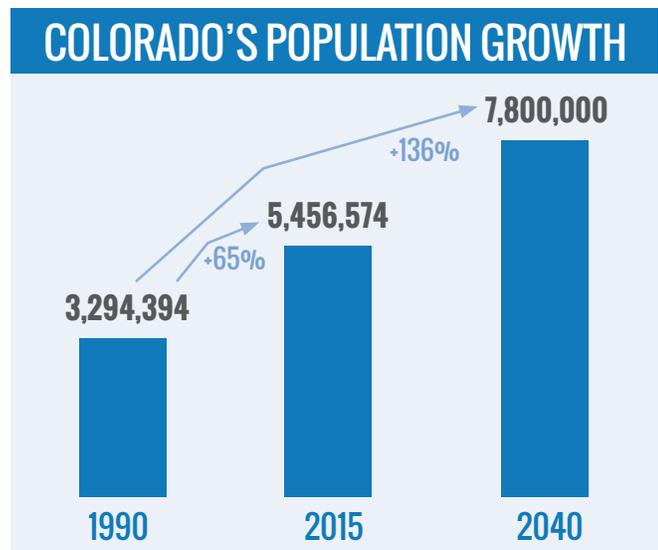
As our nation celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the National Park Service, it's important for Colorado to explore ways to ensure that public lands access remains into the future – a future that will continue to see major growth in its population and diversity in those seeking to enjoy our parks. As the Latino community commemorates the centennial of our National Parks System and encourages Coloradans to get outside to celebrate our beautiful public lands, we must keep an eye on the future.

# POPULATION GROWTH

Colorado is popular and the state's population is booming.

In the last reported period from July 2014 to June 2015, Colorado added more than 100,000 residents – now reported at 5,456,574.<sup>1</sup> The population percent increase of 1.89 was more than double that of the national average of 0.79 percent and only second to North Dakota, which added just fewer than 17,000 residents.

And to those living in the state experiencing this growth firsthand it's no surprise that this has been a longstanding trend. Since 1990, Colorado has added more than 2.1 million residents – a 65 percent population increase.<sup>2</sup>



The face of Colorado has changed dramatically since 1990 as well. The 1990 Census reported that there were 424,302 Hispanic/Latinos living in Colorado.<sup>3</sup> Latinos now make up approximately 19 percent of the state's population for a total of 1,016,791 – an increase of nearly 140 percent since 1990.<sup>4</sup> By 2040, more than one-third of Colorado's population will be Latino – an astounding growth of 525 percent since 1990.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, the state's population has gotten younger since 1990, when about 26 percent of the population was aged 18 or younger. Today, approximately 30 percent falls into that same age bracket.<sup>6</sup> Millennials – those born between the years 1982 and 2000 – are also estimated at about 28 percent of Colorado's population.<sup>7</sup>

While jobs and a thriving tech industry have been contributing factors to the growth, Colorado College State of the Rockies Project's 2015 Conservation in the West Poll<sup>8</sup> sheds more light on what

attracts residents to Colorado and why they stay. The top four reasons ranked by significant factor were:

**63%** Clean air, clean water and environment

**55%** Ability to live near, recreate on and enjoy public lands like national parks and forests

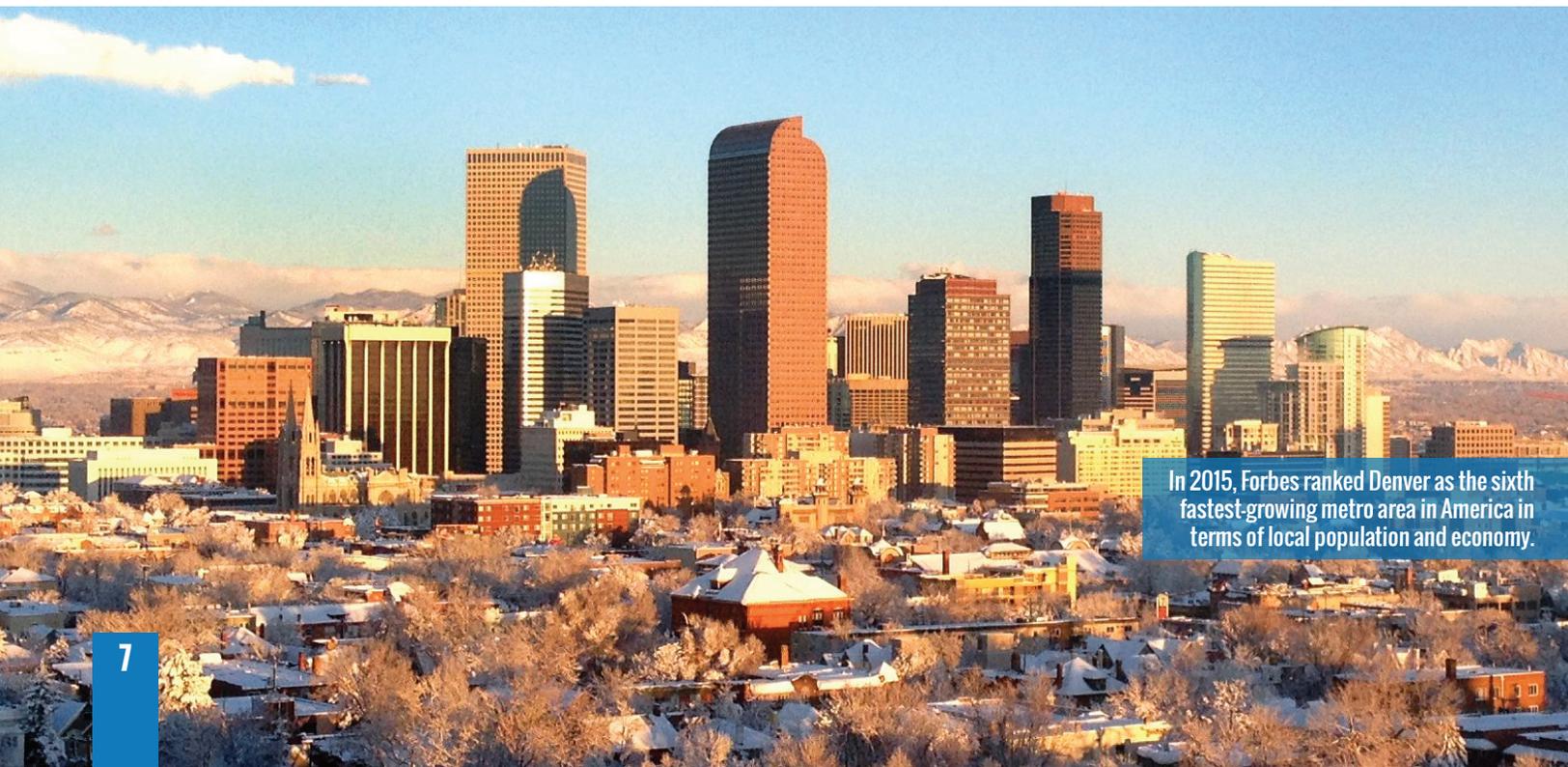
**54%** Healthy, outdoor lifestyle

**44%** Economic opportunities

Coloradans place significant emphasis on the environment, recreation and lifestyle when it comes to their decision to live in the state. In fact, Colorado Parks and Wildlife reported that 90 percent of Coloradans participate in some form of outdoor recreation each year.<sup>9</sup>

The natural beauty of the Centennial State will continue to attract more residents and see its population growth trends continue. The State Demography Office estimates that 7.8 million people will call Colorado home by 2040, an increase of about 2.3 million.<sup>10</sup>

The projected population growth for Colorado over the next 25 years will undoubtedly have an impact on housing costs, state infrastructure, natural resources, and public lands.



In 2015, Forbes ranked Denver as the sixth fastest-growing metro area in America in terms of local population and economy.

# COLORADO'S PUBLIC LANDS

From evergreen forests and mountain terrain to grasslands and desert valleys, Colorado's landscape covers the full geographic spectrum and provides unnumbered opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. In fact, Colorado boasts:

- Four national parks
- Eight national monuments
- Two national recreation areas
- Two national historic sites
- Four national historic trails
- One national scenic trail
- Two national grasslands
- 42 national wilderness areas
- Two national conservation areas
- Eight national wildlife refuges
- 28 national recreation trails



Rocky Mountain National Park was the third most visited national park in 2015.

A record 71.3 million visitors spent \$18.6 billion in Colorado in 2014 and the state's outdoor offerings were a significant factor.<sup>11</sup> Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) with its 150 lakes and 450 miles of streams was the third most visited national park in the country with more than 4.15 million visitors<sup>12</sup> – only behind the Great Smokey Mountains and the Grand Canyon.<sup>13</sup> Just three years ago, RMNP attracted 2.9 million visitors. White River National Forest, which includes eight wilderness areas, is the most visited national forest in the nation.<sup>14</sup> In 2014, more than 12.3 million individuals visited the National Forest.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2011

national survey found that 2.8 million people participate in hunting, fishing and wildlife watching each year.<sup>16</sup> In Colorado alone, outdoor recreation generates \$13.2 billion in consumer spending and \$4.2 billion in wages and salaries.<sup>17</sup>

In 2013, the total amount of land in Colorado managed by federal agencies was 23,870,652 acres – approximately 35.9 percent of the total acreage in the state.<sup>18</sup> By comparison, Colorado's western state neighbors contain greater percentages of federal public lands -- Nevada at 84.9 percent, Utah at 64.9 percent, Idaho at 61.6 percent, Wyoming at 48.1 percent and Arizona at 38.6 percent. Only New Mexico maintains a smaller percentage of federal lands at 34.7 percent.



White River National Forest is the most visited national forest.

However, what is more concerning is that only 10 percent of Colorado's total area of 66,652,953 acres is under permanent protection from development, according to the Center for American Progress's report *The Disappearing West*, which analyzed data from the U.S. Geological Survey's GAP Analysis Program.<sup>19</sup>

# IMPENDING PUBLIC LANDS CRISIS

Understanding the imminent threats facing Colorado’s public lands requires looking at multiple factors – population growth, oil and gas developments and the U.S. Congress.

## POPULATION GROWTH

While only 10 percent of Colorado’s land is under permanent protection, Colorado’s population has grown by 65 percent since 1990. And when you consider the projected growth, the population will have grown from its 1990 total by an estimated 136 percent by 2040.

This growth has led to a significant decrease in the acreage per capita – the number of acres divided by the number of residents:

YEAR	POPULATION	TOTAL STATE ACREAGE	ACREAGE PER CAPITA	PER CAPITA % CHANGE SINCE 1990
1990	3,294,394	66,652,953	20.2	-
2015	5,456,574	66,652,953	12.2	-39%
2040	7,800,000	66,652,953	8.5	-57%

The aforementioned Disappearing West report<sup>20</sup> looks at how open, natural areas in the western United States are disappearing due to human development such as roads, oil and gas wells and housing. It shows that between 2001 and 2011, a football field worth of natural areas in the west disappeared every two and half minutes. In Colorado, natural area lost was estimated to be 525 square miles, with 233 of those miles swallowed up by urban sprawl, 362 lost to energy

development, 68 gone from new transportation (roads and transmission lines) and the last 52 taken over by new agriculture and timber development. Additionally, habitat fragmentation – breaking up large continual sections of land into smaller disconnected sections – is so severe that if you were to parachute at random into a natural area in the West, you would be, on average, only 3.5 miles from developed land.<sup>21</sup>

This demonstrates just how squeezed Colorado is becoming when it comes to its open spaces and underscores the need to focus on protecting the federal lands we have, whether that means providing protections to existing unprotected federal lands or finding a balance between energy development and conservation.

## OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENTS

Colorado's BLM estimates that approximately 90 percent of the oil and gas development occurs on private and state lands. As mentioned earlier, some have sought to lease public lands – like those around Dinosaur National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park – to the oil and gas industry. This could have a tremendous impact on Colorado's landscape. For example, the Wilderness Society published its list of seven ways oil and gas drilling impacts the surrounding environment:

1. Disruption of wildlife migration routes and habitats from noise pollution, traffic and fences
2. Oil spills on land and offshore drilling sites
3. Landscape changes from well pads and roads
4. Oil and gas infrastructure and traffic spoil peaceful settings for visitors
5. Haze, toxic chemicals and dust pollute the air and water
6. Machinery, gas flares and light pollution disrupt scenic views and clear night skies
7. Dangerous methane emissions contribute to climate change<sup>22</sup>



Attempts to lease land near Mesa Verde National Park has been met with public outcry and concerns over air quality.

Out of this increase of pressure to extract more resources from the ground is the idea of finding balance between energy development and conservation. Our countries and local economies depend on oil and gas drilling, but by making conservation a priority as well, we can ensure that these developments are done responsibly and in proper places allowing some of our most treasured lands and wildernesses to remain intact for future generations.

## PUBLIC LANDS AND THE U.S. CONGRESS

While Congress can pass resolutions that are designed to protect the nation's federal public lands, it can also pass resolutions that jeopardize the future of these lands. There has been an upswell in members of Congress and special interest groups looking at ways to privatize America's public lands and auction them off for drilling, mining, and logging.

In April 2016, the Center for American Progress released its list of the top 20 members of the Anti-parks Caucus. These members not only have made anti-park public statements, but they have also introduced legislation to lessen or eliminate the Antiquities Act and encourage public lands seizures.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, many of these elected officials have been strident vocal opponents to new

Great Sand Dunes National Park was originally protected as a national monument by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1932.

national monuments, which is in stark contrast to the majority of local communities and diverse stakeholders advocating for such measures.

For example, a 2016 bill introduced by Rep. Raul Labrador (R-ID), would let states disregard environmental laws and protections as they took control of up to 4 million of acres of national forests for clear-cut logging. Under such a law, Colorado’s entire White River National Forest – the most visited in the nation – could be wiped out entirely.<sup>24</sup> In April 2015 the U.S. Senate passed an amendment to a nonbinding budget resolution to sell or give away all federal lands other than the national parks and monuments.<sup>25</sup>

This movement includes the idea of turning federal public lands over to the states. Representative Don Young’s (R-AK) 2016 bill would allow any state to seize control and ownership of up to 2 million acres of national forests within its borders.<sup>26</sup> While proponents of this idea argue it will provide greater local control, unfortunately, this would actually lead to greater financial burdens placed on the state and its taxpayers. And one potential outcome of this burden is that the state would then lease off the land as well to pass along the cost – a cost that also includes the loss of access to these outdoor opportunities.

Another tact that members of the U.S. Congress have taken is to eliminate or minimize the Antiquities Act. The Antiquities Act was signed into law in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt and provides the office of the president with the authority to protect existing federal lands as national monuments. Since its creation, it has been used by 16 presidents – eight Republicans and eight Democrats – to create over 135 national monuments including the inspiring Grand Canyon, the iconic Statue of Liberty and many other of our nation’s most spectacular and historically important public lands. The Antiquities Act has also been a critical tool in protecting important Latino cultural and historical sites like Chimney Rock, Cesar E. Chavez, San Gabriel Mountains, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountains National Monuments. In Colorado, the Antiquities Act has been responsible for the creation of the Browns Canyon, Canyons of the Ancients, Chimney Rock, Colorado, Dinosaur, Hovenweep and Yucca House National Monuments. In other instances, Mesa Verde, Great Sand Dunes and Black Canyon were all national monuments before coming national parks.

Yet, despite this bipartisan tradition of use and strong public support, the Antiquities Act continues to face ongoing attacks in Congress. Representative Rob Bishop (R-UT), who chairs the House Natural Resource Committee, is one of the most recent high-ranking elected officials to introduce several measures intended to eliminate or minimize the Antiquities Act.<sup>27</sup>

U.S. PRESIDENTS WHO HAVE USED THE ANTIQUITIES ACT	
REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT
 <b>Theodore Roosevelt</b>	 <b>Woodrow Wilson</b>
 <b>William H. Taft</b>	 <b>Franklin D. Roosevelt</b>
 <b>Warren G. Harding</b>	 <b>Harry S. Truman</b>
 <b>Calvin Coolidge</b>	 <b>John F. Kennedy</b>
 <b>Herbert Hoover</b>	 <b>Lyndon B. Johnson</b>
 <b>Dwight D. Eisenhower</b>	 <b>Jimmy Carter</b>
 <b>Gerald Ford</b>	 <b>Bill Clinton</b>
 <b>George W. Bush</b>	 <b>Barack Obama</b>

# PUBLIC LANDS FOR THE FUTURE

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The threats facing Colorado's public lands underscore the need for action to make sure future generations will be able to enjoy these locations as we do today. And the majority of the state's population agrees. For example, the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project's 2016 Conservation in the West Poll found:

- 77 percent of Colorado's voters believe national public lands help the Colorado economy
- Majorities of voters regardless of political affiliation agree conservation is an important factor in choosing candidates for office (88 percent Democrat, 77 percent Independent and 67 percent Republican)
- 59 percent of Colorado's voter oppose state takeover of public lands<sup>28</sup>

With the majority of Coloradans supportive of protecting its public lands, which are a significant draw for residents and tourists alike, action needs to be taken to prevent these natural resources from disappearing forever.

## PROTECTING NEW AREAS

As was the case with Browns Canyon, where a variety of local stakeholders – businesses, veterans, Latinos, youth, faith leaders, recreationists, environmentalists, etc. – came together to advocate for protections, change can happen through community involvement.

It's important to reiterate the Disappearing West analysis that shows only 10 percent of Colorado's lands are currently under some form of permanent protection. While this number lags behind other western states, it means there is plenty of opportunity to add to that total. And in doing so could result in financial benefits too.

As a new study from Small Business Majority shows, the national monuments designated by President Obama using his authority under the Antiquities Act have generated \$156 million in annual revenue, drive approximately \$58 million in labor income per year, and create more than 1,800 jobs per year, particularly in the outdoor recreation and tourism industries.<sup>29</sup> In fact, tourism to public lands can grow significantly after a monument designation – between 2003 and 2007

alone, some sites saw a 500 percent increase. This new data complements another recent study by Headwaters Economics which found that communities in the West have \$4,360 higher per capita income for every 100,000 acres of protected public lands.<sup>30</sup>

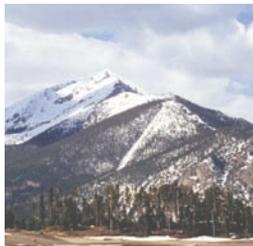
Currently in Colorado there are numerous unprotected areas in Colorado gaining support for measures, whether through Congress or through the President’s authority under the Antiquities Act, that will lead to permanent protections. These include:



### Thompson Divide:

The Thompson Divide covers approximately 221,500 and is one of the largest unprotected roadless networks in the west. However, threats from oil and gas developments could spoil this untouched beauty. Eighty-one land leases are currently being held by the oil and gas industry and the roads and infrastructure necessary to facilitate drilling would devastate the wildlife, water quality, rural character and agricultural heritage. The

Thompson Divide Coalition is seeking federal legislation to permanently withdraw the area from availability for future leasing. The coalition is also working with current leaseholders to retire existing leases, which were issued by the BLM without stakeholder input.<sup>31</sup>



### Continental Divide Wilderness:

Representative Jared Polis (D-CO) introduced a bill in May 2015 that would protect Colorado’s Central Mountains located in the Rocky Mountains of Summit County and eastern Eagle County. Senator Michael Bennet introduced a companion bill in the Senate that would also designate Camp Hale as a national historic landscape. This area features iconic vistas and offers some of the best recreational opportunities in the state. The bill would help protect 60,000 acres of wilderness lands to sustain these

recreation resources, protect critical watersheds, preserve wildlife habitat and strengthen the local tourism economy.<sup>32</sup>



### Dolores River Basin:

The Dolores River, a tributary to the Colorado River, features a basin of more than 60,000 acres and includes the San Juan Mountains. Considered some of the wildest places in the Rocky Mountain region, this area has stunning scenery, important wildlife habitat and some of the best recreation in the west. Efforts to protect it include the creation of a National Conservation Area, which would preserve it from mining and drilling developments.<sup>33</sup>

While this paper has focused on federal lands, it’s important to note that there are active and important efforts occurring at the community level. These include:



### Westwood Park:

Located in a mostly Latino, park-poor neighborhood, Westwood park was rated by the Piton Foundation as Denver’s second-most vulnerable neighborhood in readiness to support children to thrive, and it has the highest childhood obesity rate of all Denver neighborhoods. Trust for Public Land is collaborating with Westwood Unidos and the Denver Parks and Recreation to plan, develop and revitalize Westwood Park. Engaging the community in the process has been a key driver in the future of this park.<sup>34</sup>



## Montbello Open Space Park and Environmental Learning Center for Kids:

The 5.5-acre site in northeast Denver is being developed into a native outdoor space with tall prairie grasses and outdoor play areas for youth. It will also house a new building for Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK), which helps low-income and inner-city youth learn about and experience the outdoors. Partners ELK, Trust for Public Land and Denver Parks and

Recreation view the effort and the final park as an opportunity to train the next generation of scientists and environmental stewards.<sup>36</sup>

These locations represent a small sampling of the opportunities to not only add to Colorado’s list of protected places, but also to increase the ability for all in Colorado, especially youth, to engage in the outdoors. Through protection mechanisms preserving these lands will help ensure that Colorado’s wild remains wild and accessible to the growing population and future generations wanting to experience the outdoors.

## MASTER LEASING PLANS

For the millions of acres the federal government currently maintains ownership of, it’s important that they are managed thoughtfully and responsibly. The first step is to consistently use Master Leasing Plans (MLPs) when leasing land.

MLPs identify and resolve conflicts with a variety of resources such as watersheds, wildlife habitats, air and water quality, and public health and safety. To achieve this, the BLM will allow for a public commenting period to encourage engagement with the public and other stakeholders. It will also analyze potential landscape impacts and outline measures to address potential conflicts.<sup>37</sup>

As Colorado has discovered with the MLPs to address Dinosaur National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park, public participation in the process is essential in protecting the critical public lands throughout the state.

## ENGAGING GROWING COMMUNITIES

Historically in Colorado and nationwide, efforts to protect public lands have defaulted to the “usual suspects” – green groups, environmentalists and the like. While public opinion polling has often showed a vast swath of support, the effort to engage diverse voices is a more recent occurrence. As the Browns Canyon campaign demonstrated, there are many other segments of the population who maintain a desire to see Colorado’s public lands receive permanent protection.

Given the growth of the Latino population in Colorado – approximately 140 percent since 1990 – it makes sense for Latinos to play a larger roll as environmental stewards in the future. In fact, there is a permeating belief among Latinos that protecting our environment is a moral obligation.<sup>38</sup>

Joseito Velasquez, a pastor with Healing Waters Family Center who actively engaged his church and youth in the Browns Canyon effort said:

*"Colorado's clean water, wildlife habitat, cultural treasures and public lands are entrusted to us to be protected and preserved for the next generation. It is our moral responsibility to care for our land, water, and wildlife. The support of Browns Canyon demonstrates just how important stewardship of our outdoor and cultural heritage is to the Latino community."*

Pastor Velasquez's sentiments reflect the Latino community at large. In August 2014, Latino Decisions and Hispanic Access Foundation released a research brief — analyzing nine major public opinion polls from 2012 - 2014 — that found Latinos overwhelming support greater environmental protections, such as preserving parks and public lands, so much so that conservation issues could influence voting decisions.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, a 2015 report released by Latino Decisions and Hispanic Access Foundation found evidence that Latinos' concerns for the environment and protection of America's public lands is demonstrated at the voting booth – and impacts policy. The report analyzed the results of 2014 environmental ballot initiatives from four states including Colorado and determined that Latinos' voting habits on these state ballot initiatives closely correlated with their stated support for conservation. Moreover, in some states, Latino voters were a key factor in the passage of the environmental ballot initiative.<sup>40</sup>

By engaging and activating Latinos in future efforts, coalitions to protect public lands will find passionate advocates that are just beginning to exercise its political muscle.

But, the effort to engage diverse voices like those of Latinos needs to be championed by those managing these protected places. These include the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In her April 19, 2016 speech on conservation, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell emphasized the importance of diversity in visits to our national parks and she expressed support for further national monument designations that honor our country's diversity and multiculturalism.



In July 2015, Jewell met with a group of Latino millennials participating in the National Park Service and Hispanic Access Foundation's Latino Heritage Internship Program, which provides opportunities for graduate and undergraduate college students to work at various NPS sites across the country in a variety of different fields. She told the group:

*Our public lands are not used equally by all Americans ... I'm delighted to know that you are all doing your work and bringing your talent and backgrounds to park service, in this case, but more broadly just to help us understand what we need to do to make sure our public lands are welcoming to all Americans.*



Secretary Sally Jewell poses for a photo with Latino Heritage Internship Program students.

*When you look at the organizations that have typically been involved in conservation, their boards of directors and supporters are largely Caucasian and old. They're looking at their support network and advocacy and saying 'we are in trouble.' We are very committed to opening the eyes of a new generation, a richly diverse generation, to the assets and the jobs that we have available.<sup>41</sup>*

On April 28, 2016, a first-of-its-kind coalition of civil rights, environmental justice, conservation groups and community leaders and activists from across the country announced their effort to encourage the National Park Service to increase inclusion and representation of America's communities of color in our national parks and other public lands. Specifically, the group is asking President Obama to issue a Presidential Memorandum on the Centennial of the National Park Service on August 25, 2016, to encourage federal land management agencies to reflect the demographic and ethnic diversity of our nation's citizens; respect the historical, cultural and spiritual stories and unique contributions of all Americans; and actively engage all people.

One of the underlying themes of this initiative is that with the shifting demographics occurring in the U.S. – where by 2020 half of America's youth will be of color – the future of our public lands will depend upon public support from *all* Americans.<sup>42</sup>

These changing demographic also demonstrate why engaging Colorado's youth and millennials in these efforts is important. Millennials make up more than a quarter of the state's population and as the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project explained:

"This mega-generation may share the Western affinity to the outdoors held by many of their elders, but they also have the political might to dictate an agenda to their leaders that reflects their strongly-held environmental ethic in a way few have done before."<sup>43</sup>

Diversifying the movement to protect Colorado's public lands will lead to a stronger, unified effort that will wield greater influence and achieve greater outcomes. Browns Canyon proved the power it could have.

# CONCLUSION

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Colorado is changing. The population is growing. The demographics are shifting. Colorado's public lands face being squeezed out.

The threats to the state's public lands are plentiful, but by seeking to protect new areas, utilizing government tools like master leasing plans and engaging diverse voices, Colorado will take steps forward to maintain its natural resources that drive the economic engines of the tourism and recreation industries.

As Diana Luna and her fellow advocates experiences taught them in the Browns Canyon effort, the fight to achieve balance between development and conservation is challenging, but by leveraging the state's growing and changing populations, Colorado can ensure that its public lands are available for future generations to hike, camp, paddle, climb, watch, hunt, and connect forever. As we celebrate 100 years of America's best idea, this is a lesson for all to learn as we look to protecting the parks and places of the future.

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> [http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci\\_29298860/colorados-population-jumped-by-101-000](http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_29298860/colorados-population-jumped-by-101-000)
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0004986.html>
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# ABOUT HAF

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Hispanic Access Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that improves the lives of Hispanics in the United States and promotes civic engagement by educating, motivating and helping them access trustworthy support systems. Our vision is that all Hispanics throughout the U.S. enjoy good physical health, a healthy natural environment, a quality education, economic success and civic engagement in their communities with the sum improving the future of America. For more information, visit [www.hispanicaccess.org](http://www.hispanicaccess.org).

HAF was actively involved in elevating the Latino community's voice around the Browns Canyon, San Gabriel Mountains, Boulder-White Clouds, Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails, and Castle Mountains National Monument efforts. Additionally, HAF has launched the initiatives Por la Creacion Faith Based Alliance, which unites Latino faith leaders around the protection of God's creation and creating tomorrow's environmental stewards, and Latino Conservation Week, which includes dozens of conservation and outdoor-related events across the country.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Robert Fanger currently serves as the Chief Communications Officer for the Hispanic Access Foundation. His work has appeared in many of the nation's largest media outlets, including USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, CNN Espanol and Huffington Post; and local outlets like the Denver Post, La Opinión, Telemundo and Univision.

Prior to joining HAF, Robert served as the president of Fanger Public Relations, where he led communications projects and campaigns for clients such as Hispanic CREO, GEO Foundation, Starfish Initiative, IUPUI—School of Public Health, Center for Education Reform, and several others. Before launching his public relations firm, Robert served as the communications director for the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, which was created by the Nobel Laureate economist in 1996. He holds an MBA from Purdue University and a Bachelor's in Advertising/Public Relations from Franklin College's Pulliam School of Journalism.



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