



DENVER
PARKS & RECREATION

MetroDNA
METRO DENVER NATURE ALLIANCE

Regional Conservation Assessment

Summary of draft grant proposal submitted to GOCO, June 2019

Project Summary

This first-of-its-kind Regional Conservation Assessment will use existing information and planning documents to identify high-quality, connected, and climate-resilient habitat across the metro area. Metro Denver Nature Alliance (Metro DNA) partners and stakeholders - including public land and open space managers - will use the assessment to establish the ecological goals and metrics forming the foundation of the Regional Vision for People and Nature. This work supports the development of a more comprehensive and conservation-forward approach to land use planning that strengthens connectivity and equitable access to nature, protects important wildlife habitat, and maximizes the use of nature-based solutions like green infrastructure to address climate-related challenges facing our region.

Background

Colorado's natural beauty has inspired more and more people to call our State home. According to the State Demography Office, the Denver metro area population alone has grown 20 percent since 2010 and is projected to grow by 40,000 people every year from now through 2050. With the metro area's quickly expanding population, we are at risk of losing our natural spaces and the values they support: clean and abundant water, wildlife habitat, access to nature and recreation, carbon storage, and other ecosystem services. Loss of these critical natural assets limits the broader benefits to people in cities - like improved air quality, lower temperatures, positive health outcomes, and flood protection - on which the region depends. Frequently, the loss of these natural benefits hits lower-income communities hardest, exacerbating existing inequalities in the region.

Metro DNA is a coalition of partners who strive to ensure the seven-county Denver region is a thriving place for people and nature. Throughout this project and all of our collaborative projects, Metro DNA and its partners are committed to ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion in our work. In March 2019, Metro DNA's Steering Committee approved a set of *Equity Principles and Commitments* that set the guiding standard for all of our initiatives. As we lay the foundation for strategic and conservation-forward land

use decision-making in our region, we will continue to keep an eye toward how our regional planning efforts can address long-standing inequities.

We are also committed to being a learning organization and value the contributions of those who have come before us and work alongside us. We have looked to initiatives both in other regions and close-to-home to ensure this effort is relevant and complementary to current and planned efforts. Organizations and planning efforts with which we will be collaborating include:

- Each of the seven Metro Denver county and large municipal open space agencies;
- Imagine a Great Region, an initiative led by the University of Colorado - Denver (CU Denver) and the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG);
- Regional trail initiatives including the Rocky Mountain Greenway, Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership, and High Line Canal Conservancy;
- Sister metropolitan greenspace alliances in Portland, Seattle, and Chicago; and
- The Network for Landscape Conservation, a national nonprofit that advances cross-border, collaborative conservation as a vital approach to sustain nature, culture, and community;

Representatives from these various efforts will meet regularly to make certain any information created in the Assessment is aligned with and supportive of their goals and timeframes to the greatest extent possible.

Partners

Denver Parks & Recreation will be the grant recipient for the project, taking on this responsibility with the full support of the Metro DNA Steering Committee. The City and County of Denver will otherwise be considered a partner and stakeholder in the process, with no greater duties nor influence than other counties noted in the introduction and below.

Metro DNA will lead the project and ensure the creation of the Regional Conservation Assessment is consistent with the overall Metro DNA vision by providing governance and feedback related to project goals, implementation, and associated decision-making. Metro DNA will also lead coordination and integration with other initiatives.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a founding Metro DNA partner, will lead project coordination and management, and serve as liaison between the core project team and Metro DNA leadership.

Biohabitats, a contributing Metro DNA partner and leading conservation planning firm, will play a central role in the Assessment - including compiling existing datasets and developing a geospatial framework; identifying indicators and criteria for high-quality, connected, and climate-resilient habitat; and assisting Metro DNA and TNC staff in project facilitation and convening advisors and stakeholders.

Tasks & Deliverables

Tasks

1. Project management and coordination.
2. Convene a Technical Advisory Team to provide critical expertise and to define project scope, goals, and key questions.
3. Compile existing data sets and develop a geospatial framework.
4. Identify indicators and criteria for high-quality and climate-resilient habitat and conduct analysis.
5. Develop an approach to evaluate habitat connectivity and conduct analysis.
6. Engage stakeholders at important milestones.
7. Create a series of maps and identify key strategies and recommendations that will guide regional conservation efforts.

Deliverables

1. A database of relevant geospatial information that is accessible to Metro DNA partners, key stakeholders, and the public, as appropriate.
2. A memo outlining methods used to identify high-quality, connected, and climate-resilient habitat to inform future efforts.
3. An engaged Technical Advisory Team and partner network, whose expertise and input has been well-documented and can be leveraged to create a Regional Vision and its accompanying strategic action plans.
4. Key conservation targets and metrics that can guide the ecological goals and initiatives in the Regional Vision as well as identify opportunities for collaboration and action around ecosystem protection, restoration, and enhancement.
5. A conservation portfolio for the metro Denver region shared through a series of maps and narratives that is informed by communications experts and documents strategic conservation opportunities.