

# Colorado Shortgrass Prairie Initiative

Environmental Streamlining  
Through  
Proactive Environmental Stewardship





# Brief Overview

- Background on the SGPI
- How SGPI represents CDOT's Best Management Practices
- Current Status
- Setting a New Standard



# Background

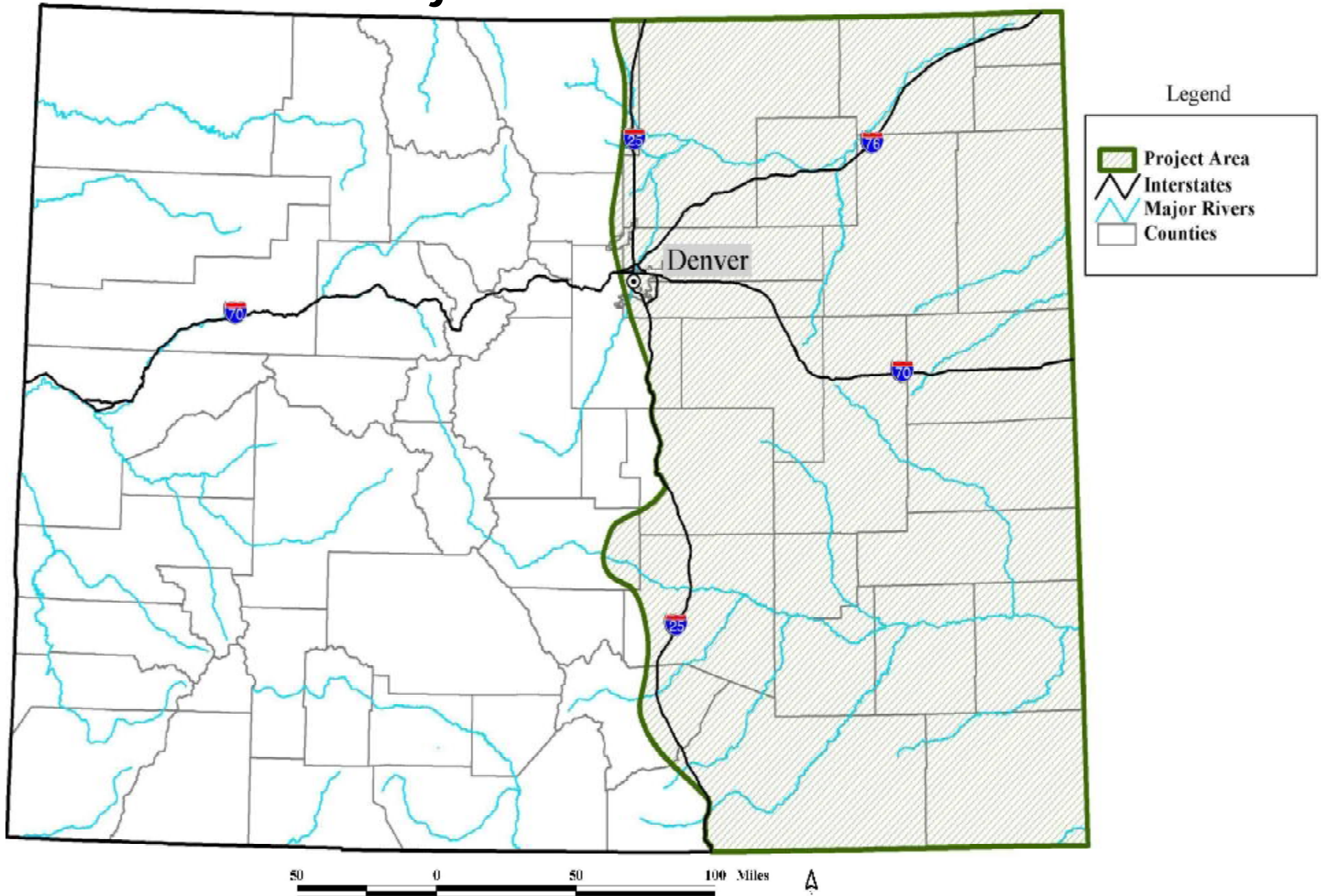
- What problems were identified?
- Who is involved?
- What projects are covered?
- When does the SGPI take effect and how long will it last?
- What actions are required to offset impacts
- How will CDOT pay for the SGPI?



# What Problems Were Identified

- The Nature Conservancy identified the Central Shortgrass Prairie ecoregion as one of the most endangered in the United States
- Home to over 40 species that are listed as Threatened or Endangered, proposed for listing, or species of concern
- 15,160 acres of potential impact identified from CDOT projects along existing transportation corridor network over the next 20 years (based upon worst-case impact scenario)

# Project Area in Colorado





# Who Is Involved

- CDOT
- FHWA, Colorado Division
- Region 6, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- The Nature Conservancy





# What Transportation Projects are Covered?

- Bridge Repairs for all existing bridges on the 20 year needs list
- Approximately 4,307 miles of resurfacing/overlays and accompanying shoulder improvements
- Maintenance along existing transportation corridors and bridges
- Safety, reconstruction, capacity, and other transportation improvements for 22 percent of the existing transportation corridor network within the Colorado Shortgrass Prairie (anticipated improvements over next 20 years)

A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a topographic map of a river valley. The map features contour lines, a river channel, and a road. The text 'V. RIVER' is visible on the map.

# When does the SGPI enter into effect, and how long does it last?

- The SGPI became effective once the final Biological Opinion (BO) was signed.
- Covers projects on the existing transportation network for twenty years from the date the BO goes into effect
- Covers impacts to 25 primary species





Mountain plover (Wendy Shattil, Bob Rozinski)

# Primary Included Species



At home with prairie dogs:  
Swift fox (Jim Brandenburg)

- Black-tailed Prairie Dog
- Botta's Pocket Gopher *rubidus* subspecies
- Northern Pocket Gopher *macrotis* subspecies
- Swift fox
- Lesser Prairie Chicken
- Western Snowy Plover
- Mountain Plover
- Long-billed Curlew
- McCown's Longspur
- Cassin's Sparrow
- Lark Bunting
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Burrowing Owl
- Northern Cricket Frog
- Texas Horned Lizard
- Massasauga
- Western Box Turtle
- Arkansas River Feverfew
- Pueblo Goldenweed
- Golden Blazing Star
- Round-leaf Four-O'clock
- Colorado butterfly plant
- Arkansas Valley Evening Primrose



Burrowing owl (Don Bacous)



Neal and Mary Jane Mishler



# What Conservation Measures Are Included

- Off-site habitat preserve are being created to preserve habitat for species in proportion to anticipated worst-case scenario impacts
- On-site best management practices for species that would not benefit from the off-site habitat preserve



# Off-Site Habitat Preserve

- Must cover at least 15,160 acres
- Must include habitat for 17 covered species
  - Species habitats overlap
- Must be preserved in perpetuity
- Must be covered by a management plan approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



# On-Site Conservation Measures

- Covers additional species not benefiting from off-site conservation
- Identifies species specific conservation measures for each species governing
  - Timing of impacts (seasonal)
  - Acceptable impacts
  - Restoration requirements



# Anticipated Benefits from SGPI

- Helps avoid listing of species/benefits environment
- Provides additional protection to CDOT should species be listed
- Saves money/time and reduces uncertainty for CDOT
- Proactive mitigation ensures species protection during the next 20 years before impacts occur
- Avoids costs associated with project delays awaiting consultation

A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a topographic map of a mountain range, likely the Colorado Rockies, with contour lines and a yellow line indicating a road or trail.

# How Will CDOT Pay for the SGPI

The Colorado Transportation Commission has created a Environmental Revolving Fund (ERF). The ERF is used to provide funding for advanced environmental projects. The ERF is then to be repaid by assessing projects that receive a benefit from the advanced environmental project.





# Current Status

- The Final Biological Assessment/Biological Assessment has been completed and approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- CDOT has contracted with TNC to implement commitments of BA/BO.

# Current Status

- CDOT has implemented maintenance BMPs
- TNC has conserved Grassland Bird Site in Northeastern Colo. ( 2,400 acres)
- TNC has conserved large unfragmented site (22,000 acres)
- Rare Plant Site – conserved by others
- Box Turtle/Lesser Prairie Chicken in process



# An Example of Environmental Best Practices

- Resource based mitigation
  - Conservation activities designed around species needs
- Predictable project costs
- Defines species conservation measures for next 20 years
- Mitigation takes place in advance of project impacts
- Avoids added expenses associated with project delays