About CoWPL
Colorado Wild Public Lands (CoWPL) exists to protect the integrity, size and quality of our public lands in Colorado, especially in the land exchange process. We monitor Colorado land exchanges and act on behalf of the public to ensure that voices are heard and land management agencies operate for the benefit of the public.

What Are Public Lands?
Lands owned and managed by public entities including the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

What Is A Land Exchange?
Land exchanges are swaps of tracts of land between government agencies, or between government agencies and private entities. Since 2000 there have been over 150 land exchanges in Colorado alone.

The Problem
Agencies are supposed to make sure that the values of the lands are equal or better for the public. That doesn't always happen. That's when we step in.

Dear Members, Colleagues and Friends,

Although it may be a strange time to be a human, one needs but to step outside, onto a trail or into the forest, to see that nature carries on in spite of us. Birds continue chirping, brooks are babbling, snow is (at least a little bit) falling. At Colorado Wild Public Lands, we find ourselves returning to nature for solace, self restoration, grounding, and a sense of normalcy.

The past few years have brought never-before-seen increases in outdoor recreation and we're excited to see new people engaging with public lands on a large scale. However, increased usership brings unique challenges and highlights the immeasurable value of public lands. The importance of keeping our Colorado public lands open and accessible has perhaps never been more apparent.

Unsurprisingly, the same pressures that led many of us to seek comfort and adventure in nature, also seem to have emboldened some to try sequestering those lands for their own. 2021 was one of the busiest years for land exchanges in our organization's history and we found ourselves constantly fighting to ensure that the public's voice is heard and that public land agencies act on behalf of the public good. In 2021 we found many victories due to this volume of work including:

- Achieving previously withheld document releases through FOIA requests
- Convincing agencies to address additional items in environmental analysis documents
- Fostering powerful collaborations with new partner organizations
- Welcoming two new Board members

The momentum of these victories carries us into 2022 and we stand ready to address any new land exchanges, constantly striving to Keep It Open, Keep It Ours.
2021 Highlights

Projects & Publications
- Recreate Responsibly on Public Lands. Brochure and web content developed for the Town of Snowmass Village and for the Roaring Fork Valley.
- CoWPL’s first VIDEO - *Who keeps an eye on your public lands?* By Outside Adventure Media

Events
- Colorado Public Lands Day
  Bird watching at Crown Mountain with Roaring Fork Audubon.
- Public Lands Video Contest
- Holiday Happy Hour at Batch Provisions in Carbondale.

Buffalo Horn Land Exchange
- The BLM issued their decision to approve the Buffalo Horn Land Exchange. CoWPL partnered with the firm Hogan Lovells to prepare and submit a protest to the decision.
- CoWPL held a meeting with community members in Meeker to provide exchange details and discuss concerns.
- CoWPL’s members’ concerns included loss of grazing, hunting grounds, and access & adjacency to public land.
- The BLM continues to deliberate CoWPL’s Protest.

Valle Seco Land Exchange
- We submitted objection comments and presented at the online San Juan National Forest Objection Hearing.
- CoWPL’s members’ concerns included the removal of Colorado Roadless Area and river lands suitable for wild and scenic designation.
- CoWPL submitted a FOIA Complaint followed by legal action to obtain the Valle Seco Land Appraisals.
- We submitted comments on the appraisals including concerns with low valuations for the Federal lands to be exchanged.
- CoWPL submitted comments of concern about losing roadless areas in the Valle Seco Roadless Area Boundary Modification process.
Why is it so difficult to track land exchanges?

- Agencies and proponents behind land exchanges start work well before the public has an opportunity to weigh in.
- Agencies perform little outreach to notify the public of land exchange updates.
- There’s no advance notice of public comment opportunities. When they do happen, the public has a window of only 30 to 45 days to submit comments.
- Land exchange analysis documents are technical and lengthy.
- The process extends over a long period of time.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 1967

Provides the public the right to request access to records from any federal agency. It’s a law that keeps citizens in the know about their government and a tool that CoWPL uses with every land exchange!

Where We Work

1. Bear Ranch
   Halted by local communities in 2014
2. Rollins Pass
   Halted by historian & advocacy groups in 2021
3. Buffalo Horn
   Final decision issued, CoWPL submitted a Protest in 2021. (Current Project)
4. Fossil Ridge
   Supported by CoWPL in 2019
5. Mt. Emmons
   Scoping & public process to start in 2022. (Current Project)
6. Blue Valley
   CoWPL submitted EIS comments in 2021 (Current Project)
7. Sutey Ranch
   Decision issued in 2014, CoWPL filed a Motion for Reconsideration
8. Valle Seco
   Draft Decision issued, CoWPL filed an Objection in 2021 (Current Project)
In November of 2019, the San Juan National Forest opened a 30-day Public Scoping Period for the Valle Seco Land Exchange. This exchange is still ongoing and exemplifies the process and many of the issues CoWPL addresses when we review proposed land exchange projects.

Overview
This project involves the exchange of nine federal parcels of land—Parcels 1-9, totaling approximately 380 acres—in the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) for one non-federal parcel of land—Parcel A, totaling 880 acres. Per the Draft Decision, the Forest Supervisor, intends to select Alternative 3 Modified for this project, which proposes to limit motorized road use on Parcel A and excludes a previously included exchange parcel. The primary issue is whether the value of the elk and deer habitat and their use of Parcel A warrants the loss of nine parcels of public land that include existing Colorado Roadless Area and land suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.

- **Current Status:** In progress. Final Land Exchange Decision Pending. Colorado Roadless Area Decision Pending.
- **Federal Agency:** San Juan National Forest, Pagosa Ranger District.
- **Proponents:** Bootjack Ranch, LLC; David C. Lindner Trust; David C. Lindner Dynasty Trust; David K. Skidmore; and Cynthia A. Sites.
- **Representatives:** Western Land Group
- **Location:** Archuleta County near Pagosa Springs, and land near the San Juan and Rio Blanco Rivers.
- **Public Land to be Conveyed to Proponent:** Nine parcels of Federal lands aggregating 380 acres.
- **Non-federal Land to be Acquired by Public:** One parcel of non-Federal lands totaling 880 acres.

Further Concerns
Colorado Wild Public Lands (COWPL) is concerned the exchange is unfair to not only adjacent landowners who will lose adjacency to public lands, but also to the public. For example, Parcel 7 (slated to become private), currently includes a public road access, and well-used camping areas near streams and among very large Ponderosa Pine trees.

Appraisals
Appraisals are used with every land exchange to identify the financial value of the land that is to be traded. They are crucial to determining whether the public is getting a fair deal or being taken advantage of. In the statutes and regulations that apply to land exchanges, equal value is required to be demonstrated for land that is to be exchanged.

For 17 months since they were first completed in August 2020, CoWPL and the public have been repeatedly denied access to the appraisals used to make decisions on this exchange, meanwhile they have been shared with the exchange proponents without redaction or restriction. It was only after numerous requests, FOIA submissions, multiple appeals, and a legal complaint, that CoWPL received the Appraisal Reports on December 22, 2021; barely a month before the Forest Service’s January 21st date to issue the Objection Resolution and Final Decision on the exchange. CoWPL requested an extension to the Valle Seco Public Comment period based on the need for more time to review the Appraisals and submit comments. The request was denied.

CoWPL maintains that it is the public’s right to know the value of lands we all collectively own; especially when they are at risk of being traded away.
In 2021, we did most of our technical analysis in-house, with many hours of volunteer time and staff assistance. Together, members logged over 600 hours of volunteer time! Several of the land exchanges that we are analyzing have progressed to the point that CoWPL requires legal consultation. CoWPL is grateful to our attorneys who assisted with FOIA appeals and protests to land exchange decisions on a pro bono or reduced fee rate. This year, although CoWPL's expenditures exceeded our revenue (net -$9,513), we used our savings from last year to remain on budget.

**Revenue**

- **Corporate** $5,744
- **Roosevelt ($1,000+)** $19,015
- **Pinchot ($250+)** $6,935
- **Abbey ($25+)** $4,360
- **Staff - Admin, Operations & Outreach** $27,669
- **Staff - Technical Work** $9,293
- **Business Expenses** $1,992

**Expenditure**

- **639 hours of volunteer time**
- **4,521 publicly owned acres proposed for exchange**
- **21 sensitive species likely impacted by land exchanges**
- **$9,048,000 total appraised value of public land proposed for exchange**

*reflects only Valle Seco, Buffalo Horn, and Blue Valley land exchanges.*
Thanks to our Members & Donors

On behalf and in recognition of all public lands in Colorado, CoWPL would like to extend a huge thank you to all of our members and supporters in 2021. Last year was our biggest fundraising year to date and we are working hard to make 2022 even more impactful.

Abbey ($25+)
- Paul Andersen
- James Anderson
- Diane Argo
- Glenn Auerbacher
- Bruce and Lucy Baizel
- Brad Bauer
- Dina Belmonte
- Karla Breitenstein
- Melinda Bywaters
- Jean Campbell
- Barbara D’Autrechy
- Steven Deliyianis
- Michael Derzon
- Susy Ellison
- Sarah Emery
- Willie Fender
- Rica Froelicher
- Ginni Galicinao
- Khara Gaw
- Dean and Audrey Gent
- William Gibson
- Helene Gude
- Steve Haines
- Paul Hays
- Hazel Sangree Hays
- Arlan Hemphill
- Jesse Hill
- John Hoffman
- Cindy Houben
- Patrick Hunter
- Suzanne Jackson
- Elise Jones

Pinchot ($250+)
- Suzanne Jones
- Steve & Kim Jordan
- Diane Kenney
- Neil Levine
- Susan Lindbloom
- Daniel Marz
- Maura Masters
- Marlene Mickey
- Mandela Mischler
- Brian Mordecai
- Margaret Mulqueen
- Joan Northrop
- Kent and Ruth Obee
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- David Wiens
- Christopher Winter
- B.Travis Wright

Corporate
- 777 Investment Corp.
- Alpine Bank
- Amazon Smile
- City Market Community Rewards
- KPCO LLC
- Rickenbaugh Automotive Group

Grants & Foundations
- Margaret A Frank Fund
- The Chicago Community Trust
- Pitkin County Commissioners
- Save Cheyenne
- Swaha Foundation
- Town of Snowmass Village

Roosevelt ($1000+)
- Stefanie Davis
- Francis & Heather Froelicher
- Albert & Mary Krueger
- Jean Perry
- Katherine Rich
- Anne Rickenbaugh
- Richard Yount

We couldn’t do what we do without our members and supporters. What inspires you most to give? How did you first get involved with CoWPL? We’d love to hear about your connection to our work — shoot us an email at coloradowildpubliclands@gmail.com
Staff Transitions

Suzanne Jackson started work with CoWPL in Fall of 2017. Initially she was hired to help the Board members with administrative duties that were growing as the reach of the group expanded. It wasn’t long before Suzanne was caught up in the advocacy mission of the organization, and the complex process of land exchanges. After four and a half years, Suzanne will be leaving the organization with a now eight-member Board, in the capable hands of Graham Ward. We wish Suzanne well as she carries her art equipment and stretches her legs, wandering among our fine public lands.