

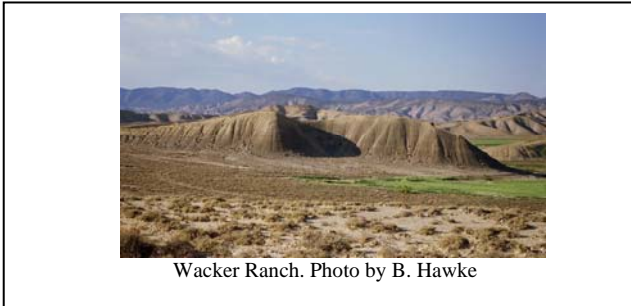
THE COLORADO NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM AND PARTNERS PROTECT ENDANGERED WILDFLOWER IN MONTROSE!

Hollywood couldn't have scripted it any better: an endangered wildflower that only occurs in Colorado; a parcel of private land that is threatened by real estate development and off-highway vehicles; an enthusiastic coalition of government and non-governmental groups. Unlike many stories about rare plants in Colorado, this tale has an undeniable happy ending. The Wacker Ranch, home to one of the best populations of the federally endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*), is now protected for future generations. This story is one for the conservation history books.



A CRITICAL PROPERTY

The 43-acre Wacker Ranch is located just outside of Montrose, Colorado, in the Adobe Hills ecosystem which supports rare plants, unique soil crusts and imperiled lichens. The Ranch is adjacent to Bureau of Land Management property, and together these parcels house one of the largest and most viable populations of clay-loving wild buckwheat in the world! CNAP, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) have been working with the landowners for over 20 years to protect the plants; but early last year, **the Ranch was put on the real estate market**. In an area that is growing as rapidly as Montrose, the loss of this important habitat was imminent. Decisive action was necessary to avoid the loss of this critical property....



DECISIVE ACTION

The wheels of conservation snapped into motion across the state when people learned of the potential loss of the Wacker Ranch.

- Because of the long standing relationship with CNAP, the Wackers contacted CNAP staff first when they considered selling the property in fall of 2006;
- CNAP contact TNC and CNHP because they had also been involved with the property over the last 20 years;
- CNHP botanists confirmed the importance of this population;
- The Colorado Parks Board voted to allow the use of \$13,000 in Colorado Lottery funds to buy and option on the property to take it off the real estate market for a year;
- CNAP and TNC jointly prepared a Recovery Land Acquisition Grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which was awarded in the amount of ~\$160,000. TNC had some key funding for the project and CNAP was eligible for the Fish and Wildlife federal assistance to the state;



- The Nature Conservancy contributed match funding to secure the federal grant;
- The Friends of Colorado Natural Areas, TNC, Center for Native Ecosystems, and the Colorado Native Plant Society raised over \$17,000, using snappy slogans such as “Buckwheat: it’s not just for pancakes anymore!”;
- The Natural Areas Program received the Fish and Wildlife grant and then closed on the property in March of 2007.
- TNC agreed to a 25 year management agreement of the site while the Friends of Natural Areas and partners will continue to do fundraising to build funds and relationships for long-term management.

With such wholesale support from the conservation community and the general public, the protection of the Wacker Ranch has become a reality.

CONSERVATION SUCCESS

As of March, 2007, the conservation community can breathe a little easier. CNAP and State Parks is now the owner of the 43-acre ranch, and TNC will manage the property for the protection of the clay-loving wild buckwheat. The land, as well as the buckwheat, will be monitored closely and access will be restricted to researchers and guided tours. CNAP will seek designation for the Wacker Ranch Natural Area with the Natural Areas Council and the Montrose County Commissioners and will work closely with the BLM and TNC to secure the population that spans the property boundaries.



Photo by Dickson Pratt

This story has been a notable model of how those who care about biodiversity and habitat conservation can rally around and protect Colorado’s imperiled plants. Congratulations to all who worked so hard on this success story. Stay tuned, we hope this is just the first episode in a conservation mini-series that is about to unfold.

