



## The Southeast Colorado Biological Inventory

Ranchers in southeast Colorado's shortgrass prairie, canyon and mesa country have known for generations that their ranches are home to spectacular wildlife resources. Southeastern Colorado is home to the largest intact working shortgrass prairie landscape in the United States. Grasslands are among the most highly altered of all ecosystems worldwide. The one exception is Colorado's eastern plains centered in Las Animas County; where native grasslands, juniper savannas, and canyons still retain much of their historic integrity and support many species of conservation concern.

This area is almost entirely in private ownership and is extensively utilized for cattle production. In the fall of 2006, a group of more than 40 local ranchers approached CCALT and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) about the possibility of conducting a biological inventory in southeast Colorado the summers of 2007 and 2009.

The Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) agreed to complete the inventory. A partnership was formed between landowners, the Land Trust and CNHP that protected private property rights while allowing scientists unprecedented access to private ranches.



GOCO awarded the project a total of \$254,000 over both phases and their funding was matched by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), Colorado Division of Wildlife, and landowner donations. CNHP and its partners began their work with ranchers by surveying 26 private ranches in southeastern Colorado over two years. Researchers documented 123 species and plant communities of conservation concern, including 41 animals, 36 plants, and 46 vegetative communities. The results from the study surpassed all expectations and provided sound scientific information on the biological species in the area; along with reports on how private land stewardship provides important habitat for many species of plants and animals.

This study helped recognize that private ranchlands have great value to society and that there is a public interest in seeing these lands remain intact and in production. It is our hope that the inventory results will help the private landowners of the area stay on the land and pass their legacy on to the next generation of ranchers.