

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES PROJECT (AGRICULTURE): OWL MOUNTAIN PARTNERSHIP

Conducted by: Owl Mountain Partnership
 On the Web: www.northpark.org/owlmtn
 Contact: Jerry Jack, Owl Mountain Partnership
 Project Partners: North Park Conservation District, U.S. Department of the Interior – Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish & Wildlife Service/Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge; National Park Service – Rocky Mountain National Park; U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service/Routt National Forest and Natural Resources Conservation Service; Colorado Division of Wildlife; Colorado State Forest Service; Colorado Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation; Colorado State Land Board; Colorado Natural Heritage Program; Colorado Wildlife Heritage Program; Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Program; Colorado State University and CSU Cooperative Extension; North Park School District; Town of Walden; University of Northern Colorado; University of Wyoming; Landowners

Contract Period: 1993-2001
 NPS Funding: \$295,041
 Matching Funds: \$1,372,320

Bringing together government and local stakeholders, the Owl Mountain Partnership (OMP) set forth to create a model for ecosystem management by collaboration and consensus on the local level. Despite early resistance, OMP succeeded in bringing together a broad cross-section of government and private stakeholders.

OMP focused on developing a more effective, efficient and defensible resource management strategy by integrating the best available science with local knowledge and expertise.

The ecosystem management process early on focused on wildlife/livestock conflicts and plant/animal inventories. OMP then moved to the broader task of managing the ecosystem as a whole in a sustainable, adaptive way providing for ecological diversity, economic viability and preservation of the social fabric.

The partnership takes its name from Owl Mountain, a key landmark southeast of Walden. The project area is approximately 375 square miles with 67 percent being public land and 33 percent being privately held. Two principle rivers, the Illinois and Michigan, flow through the project area.

Managing water quality through the use of best management practices (BMP) is a key part of the overall strategy.

The first five years of the project were marked by numerous successes. OMP was instrumental in creating wetlands on a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) grazing

allotment with the cooperation of area ranchers, Ducks Unlimited and the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

OMP also worked with area ranchers to create land management plans for economic, biological and cultural sustainability. Included in this strategy was special fencing to keep elk from haystacks and reduce wildlife and livestock conflicts.

Water developments on BLM, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and private lands provided water for livestock and reduced the pressure on riparian areas. Neighboring underground springs were developed as a water source for wildlife and were fenced from livestock.

Conducting an extensive inventory of both vegetation and wildlife helps both private and public land managers assess and monitor the health of the range and review management strategies.

Stream sampling provided sedimentation data to measure water quality improvements.

The management of the ecosystem is an ongoing process which includes regular monitoring and data collection, information and education efforts, and consensus building. The OMP continues to strive to be a community-led force that seeks to enhance land health by identifying and solving problems on a local level in a coordinated fashion.

In addition, OMP is attempting to increase community involvement and educational outreach as well as solidify long-term financial support for its objectives.

“There is tremendous pressure to change the way we've been using our natural resources. There's no question change will occur. It's whether that change comes from within the community or from without.”

– Steve Porter, Colorado Division of Wildlife biologist and former project manager for the Owl Mountain Partnership

Owl Mountain Partnership Fundamentals of Ecosystem Management

1. Increased trust must be developed between local stakeholders and all levels of government.
2. Ecosystems allow harvest and use of appropriate natural resources on a sustainable basis.
3. Local people being affected must be involved and empowered to make decisions and implement actions that will contribute to sustaining the social, cultural, economic and ecological systems on which they depend.
4. Environmental education is a crucial element of management because it is a process of mutual learning about the interactions and interdependence of socio-cultural, economic and ecological systems that support mankind.
5. Issues that drive an ecosystem management effort must, in large measure, originate from the community's grass roots, where a sense of place and community ties, to a natural world are best expressed.

