Title
Early corridor evaluation pilot project

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**EARLY CORRIDOR EVALUATION PILOT PROJECT**

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**Abstract**

In 1999 and 2000, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) gathered a variety of environmental information along US Highway 24 east of Colorado Springs. CDOT mapped wetlands, plant communities, wildlife corridors and habitat of imperiled species using a combination of photo interpretation and field delineation onto Mylar overlays over aerial photography. Data on sensitive species and cultural resource data were gathered using traditional survey methods. Subscription data for Colorado was purchased using corridor funds. All of the information was entered into CDOT's Geographic Information System (GIS).

CDOT evaluated the process of collecting and storing data early in the project planning process and examined its utility for streamlining the environmental process while maintaining or improving environmental compliances. CDOT also evaluated the wetland mapping process for accuracy and its use as a potential substitute for jurisdictional wetland delineations.

CDOT found that aerial photography, although potentially costly, can be a powerful tool for the identification and location of environmental resources early in project planning. GIS provides an efficient way to store, retrieve, share and analyze information on an immediate and long-term basis. Electronically stored data can provide a solid baseline from which a variety of analyses, such as impact assessments, can be completed. Other possible applications include evaluation of transportation alternatives, identification of mitigation strategies and cumulative impact assessments.

Because of the power inherent in this type of data collection, CDOT will continue to develop the corridor evaluation process. Costs of remotely gathered data can be high, therefore, data gathering efforts need to be focused on specific objectives, and a corridor wide environmental database needs to be carefully designed. CDOT presented a poster session that described this process, their results and how CDOT hopes to implement this process in the future on other corridors.

**Biographical Sketch:** Beth Chase is an Environmental Planner for the Colorado Department of Transportation’s Division of Transportation Development, Planning Branch, Environmental Planning and Policy Unit. She has been with CDOT since 1996. Currently, Beth specializes in Corridor Evaluations and Developing Streamlining Procedures at the Corridor Level. Beth earned her B.A. in Environmental Science, with minors in Religious Studies and Psychology, at the University of Denver.