EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ***Comprehensive Statewide Wetlands Classification and Characterization*** (CSWCC) project is a three-year effort of the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP), in partnership with Colorado State University, and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife (DOW) Wetlands Program to integrate previously collected data and develop a floristic classification for the wetlands of Colorado. Floristic classification and characterization of wetland types is an important step toward understanding the nature and dynamics of Colorado wetlands. It is an essential tool to help meet DOW Wetland Program goals for protecting wetland habitat and wetland-dependent wildlife. It also establishes a basis for focusing wetland research, land management, and conservation efforts where they will be most effective and beneficial.

The first phase of this project (1999-2000) integrated previously collected data, especially from the CNHP Statewide Riparian Classification (Kittel et al.1999a), CNHP wetland inventories (1995-present), and Colorado State University (Dr. David Cooper) and grouped over 4,500 stands by hydrogeomorphic class and subclass (Hupalo et al. 2000).

The second phase of the project (2000-01) defined plant associations within each of the hydrogeomorphic (HGM) subclasses (Colorado Geologic Survey et al. 1998) and classified them according to the National Vegetation Classification System (USNVC). Expanding on the *Classification of Riparian Wetland Plant Associations of Colorado* of Kittel et al. (1999), the second phase identifed and described wetland plant associations that occur outside riparian areas. The CSWCC includes both native and non-native vegetation from near- pristine sites and sites that have been altered by natural or anthropogenic disturbances.

In the third and final phase of the project (2001-2003) the results of the classification were compiled for public distribution in the form of a printed field guide to the wetland and riparian plant associations of Colorado and an accompanying CD-ROM which includes new or updated descriptions (Community Characterization Abstracts) for all described associations, as well as a user-friendly database of all plot data used in the classification.

One hundred and eighty-four plant associations in four HGM classes (Depressional, Flats, Riverine and Slope) and ten HGM subclasses (D1, D2/3, D4/5, F1, S1/2, S3/4, R1, R2, R3/4, R5) are described in the field guide. Fourty-four of the 184 associations included in the guide are newly described since the work of Kittel et al. (1999). Associations are arranged into forest, woodland, shrubland, and herbaceous types. Each plant association is ranked and prioritized in terms of imperilment and biodiversity significance with global and state ranks when available. The guide includes a dichotomous key which helps users to identify plant associations in the field.

This report also includes tables of associations by HGM group and a list of undescribed associations.