

LARIMER COUNTY
OPEN LANDS PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT
1999

LARIMER COUNTY
PARKS & OPEN LANDS

A message from the chairman
What a Difference a Year Makes!

Protecting our county's rich natural heritage is an on-going challenge, made more difficult by rapidly rising land costs. This time last year, a funding shortage loomed and the opportunity to pursue new open space projects was sharply limited. Thanks to the voters of Larimer County, this has now changed. We can anticipate a long-term program to protect open lands and the prospects are truly exciting!

In 1999 a grassroots citizens committee, Help Preserve Open Spaces (HPOS), organized to extend the existing 1/4 cent open space sales tax for another 15 years. The initiative also established bonding authority for the County, which allows us to protect open space at current market values and low interest rates. HPOS successfully gathered over 14,000 signatures, sending "Initiative 100" to the voters. In November, voters solidly supported the open space initiative by 60% — proving that loss of open space contin-

ues to be a top concern among citizens of Larimer County.

Proceeds from the open space sales tax have already preserved over 8,000 acres of important open lands in Larimer County. With a long-term funding source now assured, the Open

Lands Program is working hard to identify new open land protection opportunities and is actively engaged with a number of landowners to finalize purchase and protection agreements. In the coming year we can expect announcements about a broad range of new projects. A new regional park in the southern foothills, protection of river corridors and wildlife habitat, and conservation of key agricultural lands threatened by development, are among the many projects the county is actively working on.

Work also continues on previously announced projects, such as Fossil Creek Reservoir and expanding areas such as the Devil's Backbone. As we anticipate these new projects, it's important to remember that a minimum of fifteen percent of the revenue from the HPOS Initiative will continue to be reserved for long-term management of lands that are preserved.

Another notable highlight is our Small Grants Program. We anticipate expanding this program because it has generated a lot of interest and provides an important funding source for non-profit groups to implement wildlife habitat improvements as well as other resource protection projects.

As witnessed by the strong support of Initiative 100, citizen involvement has been a critical component of our program in the past, and will continue to be in the future. We look forward to working with you in keeping Larimer County a place we can all be proud to call home!



Tom Keith,
Chair, Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board

A message from the director

Community Support is Invaluable to Open Lands Program

1999 has been very productive. Parks and Open Lands has protected more of our beautiful natural areas and provided citizens with improved public facilities and rewarding recreational opportunities.

Thanks to voter approval, the Fairgrounds and Events Center initiative will finance facility construction on our site, located east of I-25 near the Fort Collins/Loveland Airport exit. Voters also approved the extension and bonding of the open space sales tax. In addition, citizens voted to de-Bruce Larimer County revenues, which means the county will receive about 5.4 million in additional revenue in 2000, without increasing the property tax rate. I would like to thank the voters who made these measures possible with their support.

Improvements in 1999 include a Parks and Open Lands Visitor Center at Carter Lake. Proudly, the center was funded primarily with private dollars. The Bureau of Reclamation and the Open Lands Program also contributed. Park user-fees were not involved. The project was completed on time and under budget!

To keep you abreast of the doings of Parks and Open Lands, a video "Preserving Our Western Landscape" was produced depicting the Open Lands Program. Also, we added a Parks and Open Lands web site (www.co.larimer.co.us/parks/openland.htm) where you can reference maps, photographs, and descriptions of parks and open space. The video is also available on our web site or at area libraries.

Without community support, parks and open lands in Larimer County could not have achieved the level of success we now have. In addition, I would like to recognize the Open Lands Advisory Board and our staff for the myriad of accomplishments in 1999, most prominently the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail. We hope to continue to earn the respect of the community, and strive to accomplish our mutual goals of preserving and protecting parks and open lands in Larimer County.



Greg Pickett,
Director, Parks and Open Lands Department

“The solid success of the 1999 ballot initiative to extend the Open Spaces Sales Tax is a clear mandate that this is a program that people want, and a program that is working very well!”

*Cheryl Olson,
County Commissioner District 2*

Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

of the Larimer County Open Lands Program

The Mission of the Open Lands Program is to preserve and provide significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural diversity. Efforts to fulfill this mission are guided by the following principles:

- Important open lands, natural areas, parks and trails are defined in the Help Preserve Open Spaces Initiative, the Larimer County Parks Master Plan, and other adopted plans.
- Available resources will be invested to achieve a balance between urgent, immediate demands and farsighted, long-range goals.
- Acquisition is fair to property owners, taxpayers and Larimer County citizens, and is from willing sellers only.
- An emphasis is focused on working with willing landowners to develop land-use alternatives and protection strategies that meet the landowner's financial needs and the County's goal to preserve significant open lands.
- Stewardship is very important. Larimer County will develop wise management policies that fit within fiscal resources. Development of trails and recreation facilities will minimize conflicts with wildlife and will be sensitive to the natural environment.
- Distribution of funds over time for open lands, parks and trails is balanced and fairly distributed throughout the county.
- Cooperation with partners is important to leverage available resources.

Maximizing Open Space Sales Tax Dollars Through Grants

During the four years of its existence, the Open Lands Program continually has striven to maximize its "bang-for-the-buck" by leveraging its dollars through partnerships, bargain sales, donations, and grant monies. In fact, from 1996-1998, the Larimer County Open Lands Program participated in successful grants that totaled over \$5 million. 1999 proved to be no exception to this favorable trend.

The first grant award for 1999 was a second round of funding for the Poudre-Big Thompson Rivers Legacy Project, a multi-agency effort to protect the riparian corridors of the Poudre and Big Thompson Rivers as well as protect the northern watershed of the Poudre River, including the Laramie Foothills. Great Outdoors Colorado awarded \$2.5 million to the Legacy Project to continue the work started with the 1996 grant award of \$3.4 million. The Larimer County Open Lands Program's share of the 1999 grant award is \$350,000.

This success was shortly followed by more good news with a \$200,000 grant from the Stryker Short Foundation to help acquire 247 acres adjacent to the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail. This acquisition will enable the Nature Trail to be expanded northward, creating a six mile trail system.

Finally, Great Outdoors Colorado awarded \$60,000 to Larimer County to develop new recreational opportunities at Pinewood Reservoir. The GOCO grant monies, together with a generous donation by Mr. Robert Ramsay, will build three miles of new trails with a scenic overview, and a new picnicking and parking area.



A view of Pinewood Reservoir from Ramsay-Shockey Open Space.

Photo by Scott Bacon

Committed Volunteers on the Open Lands Board

As a citizen advisory group, the Open Lands Board makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners regarding open space, regional park and trail acquisitions. The membership of the board represents a balance in geography, population, and interest.

Open Lands Board and Staff

Sitting left to right: Wendell Amos, K-Lynn Cameron*, Linda Stanley, Meegan Flenniken*. Standing left to right: Daryl Burkhard*, Brian Hayes, Merrill Kaufmann, Charlie Gindler*, Tom Shoemaker, Kerri Traynor*, Larry Kendall, Milan Karspeck, Tom Keith, and George Hix. Not pictured: John Heaton, Pete Salg, Nancy Wallace, Greg Pickett*, and Jerry White*.

* Staff



Managing Open Lands for Wildlife, Agriculture and YOU!

Good land stewardship and management is one of the most important directives of your Open Lands Program. In 1999, the Open Lands Program completed resource management plans for four properties: The Devil's Backbone Nature Trail; Ramsay-Shockey Open Space; Long View Farm; and the Hughey Property addition to Horsetooth Mountain Park. A management plan is currently being developed for the Fossil Creek Resource Management Area and completion is anticipated for 2000.

Long vistas, working landscapes, abundant wildlife, hiking trails, and open meadows are just some of the values that the Open Lands Program seeks to protect. Resource management plans are a key component in guiding good stewardship of Open Lands properties. They ensure that values for which these lands were purchased, whether it be an important geologic feature, significant wildlife habitat, or a trail corridor, are protected and enhanced. For example, in planning the

trail at the Devil's Backbone, a raptor biologist from the Division of Wildlife was consulted and the trail routed so as to avoid impacting a sensitive nest site. Similarly, at the Ramsay-Shockey Open Space, site visits with an archaeologist and a wetlands biologist helped to plan the trail route away from significant archaeological sites and to sustain the health of a wetland.

Involving the community! Extensive citizen as well as professional involvement is utilized to ensure full representation of all interested in the management planning process. Adjacent landowners, diverse user groups, natural resource specialists, partnering agencies, and citizens are encouraged to attend workshops to identify visions, opportunities, and constraints associated with each property. Once a management plan has been drafted based on the initial public workshop, another open house is held for additional public review and comment.

Good land stewardship is a high priority for the Larimer County Open Lands Program and we will continue to involve citizens in the resource management planning process. Through the development of solid resource management plans, the Open Lands Program can continue to provide Larimer County citizens with a quality of life – wide, open landscapes, plentiful wildlife, and recreational opportunities – they have chosen for today and for the future.



Deer are important inhabitants of Larimer County Open Lands

1999 Acquisition and Improvement Highlights

Devil's Backbone Expansion (Hunter)

In partnership with the Stryker-Short Foundation and the City of Loveland, Larimer County purchased an additional 247 acres to expand the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail. Included in this purchase is a conservation easement on the farthest north portion of the Devil's Backbone rock outcrop. This acquisition protects additional wildlife habitat, a rare plant community, and provides for expanded recreational activities. The extension of the existing 3.5-mile nature trail onto the Hunter acquisition is planned for the fall of 2000.

Total Cost: \$864,500

Larimer County Open Lands: \$589,500

“Management of County Open Lands is extremely important to citizens. A good management plan reflects good stewardship of the land. Managing our Open Lands properties well, honors the people who voted for the sales tax and especially honors the agricultural community who preserved the land through their stewardship.”

Kathay Rennels,
County Commissioner District 1

Reservoir Improvements

The Open Lands Program partnering with the Bureau of Reclamation took on improvement projects at Horsetooth, Carter, and Flatiron Reservoirs, where 80% of the construction was completed in-house. At Horsetooth, campsite facilities were modernized with electrical hookups and improved with handicapped access. A handicapped fishing pier, a new bathroom, and tent sites were added at Flatiron Reservoir, and the parking area was improved to accommodate three times the number of day use visitors. Drinking water spigots were added at all three reservoirs.

Total Cost: \$ 509,553

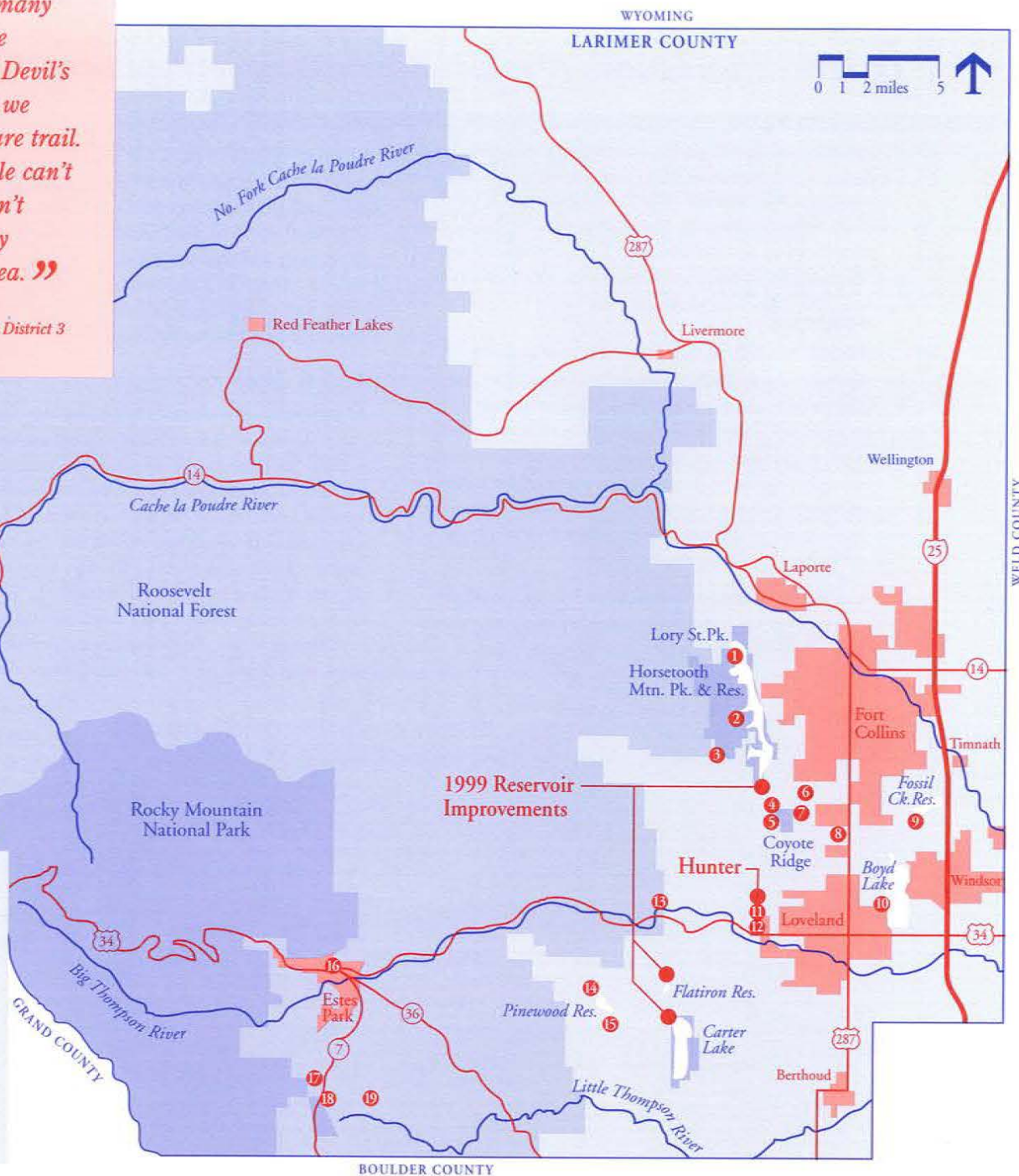
Larimer County Open Lands: \$225,000

1996-1998 Acquisitions

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Horsetooth Res. Improvements | 10. Heinrich |
| 2. Horsetooth Mtn. Pk. (Soderberg) | 11. Devil's Backbone (Golden) |
| 3. Horsetooth Mtn. Pk. (Hughes) | 12. Devil's Backbone (Wild) |
| 4. Coyote Ridge (Steppel) | 13. Sylvan Dale Ranch |
| 5. Coyote Ridge Expansion | 14. Ramsay-Shockey Open Space |
| 6. Franz Farm | 15. Blue Mountain Bison Ranch |
| 7. Coyote Ridge Addition | 16. Bickel |
| 8. Long View Farm | 17. Childers/Henning |
| 9. Williams | 18. Lily Lake (Roessler) |
| | 19. Smitherman Ranch |

“I've met so many people that were unaware of the Devil's Backbone until we opened the nature trail. Now those people can't believe this wasn't always a County preservation area.”

*Jim Disney,
County Commissioner District 3*



1999 Reservoir Improvements

A Tale of Six Cities — Project Accomplishments in 1999

The Help Preserve Open Space sales tax revenue is shared by Larimer County and six municipalities in the county. Revenue sharing is specified so that all county residents will benefit. Shares are distributed based on population or sales tax generation, whichever is most beneficial to that community. Each community uses its share for open space, natural areas, parks or trails.

Berthoud

In 1999, Berthoud constructed the first phase of a recreational trail, the Nielson Greenway. The Town partnered with Colorado State Parks and Great Outdoors Colorado to make this trail possible. Berthoud also purchased 11 acres of low elevation riparian corridor along Dry Creek, adjacent to 4.5 acres of dedicated parkland to provide a new 15.5 acre nature park. The Town is currently working on Phase I of this park — called Dry Creek Nature Preserve.

In addition, Berthoud is cooperating with Loveland and Larimer County on a community separator plan that identifies a buffer between the two cities.

Estes Park

In 1999, the Estes Park made payments for the lease/purchase of the Willows property leveraged with dollars from the County's open space tax. This open space is located north of the Municipal Building in the downtown area and contains 4.3 acres of valuable riparian habitat. This was a purchase Estes Park had desired to make for years, but could never find the funding until the Open Space program began.

Fort Collins

In combination with sales tax revenues received from the City's Building Community Choices program, Fort Collins' share of the HPOS sales tax funds the ongoing Natural Areas Program. Funding from both sources was used to continue the highly successful efforts to protect key natural areas and open lands within Fort Collins and the surrounding area. The City acquired eight parcels totaling over 250 acres of land. These parcels were primarily in the Fossil Creek drainage and along the Poudre River. Negotiations continue on several large acquisition parcels totaling over 2,000 acres.

Fort Collins also continued habitat enhancement and restoration projects at Coyote Ridge Natural Area and other sites, improved public access and parking areas at Kingfisher Point and Riverbend Ponds, and

improved many of the trails at Pineridge, Riverbend Ponds, Maxwell, and other sites. The Fossil Creek Trail, through the Cathy Fromme Prairie, was opened for public use during 1999 and a grand opening was held for the Coyote Ridge Natural Area. These sites now offer unique opportunities to enjoy a quiet hike on the trails and to learn about our natural heritage from a series of interpretive signs.

Loveland

1999 was a successful year for Loveland's Natural Areas Program with the purchase of key parcels on the west side of Boyd Lake State Park and the Big Thompson River. These parcels met the goals of the Open Lands Commission and are now valuable assets to the community. By year-end several other parcels were under negotiation. Natural areas surrounding the Loveland now total nearly 2000 acres.

During 1999, management responsibilities for the Natural Areas Program were transferred to the Parks and Recreation Department. Two staff positions were created to manage this program, develop management plans, and preserve open lands. Maintenance is performed by park crews and volunteers.

Timnath

Timnath continues to save its share for a trail project that will connect to the Poudre River Trail System. The trail system will eventually encompass Fort Collins, Timnath, Windsor, and Greeley.

Wellington

Wellington continues to save its funds for future projects such as a new park within the town and playgrounds at existing parks.

Help Preserve Open Spaces Tax Revenues Benefit the Entire Community

Money to fund the Open Lands Programs comes from a 1/4 cent sales and use tax. The tax is not imposed on food.

The tax continues through 2018, and total revenue collected to date is over \$25 million. Distribution to incorporated areas is based on the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation.

Annual Revenue Distribution of Open Space Tax Dollars*

	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Larimer County	2,259,975	2,485,421	2,707,553	3,067,810	10,520,759
Berthoud	71,154	80,969	87,574	101,539	341,236
Estes Park	161,905	178,198	193,453	224,779	758,335
Fort Collins	2,107,473	2,319,562	2,487,606	2,850,066	9,764,707
Loveland	847,210	932,139	1,003,872	1,146,823	3,930,044
Timnath	4,221	4,646	5,025	5,732	19,624
Wellington	29,848	32,520	40,557	47,494	150,419
Totals	5,481,786	6,033,455	6,525,640	7,444,243	25,485,124

* 1999 figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid 2000. Figures in this table have been rounded when appropriate.

Inventory of Open Lands Acquisitions (through 1999)

Name	Acreage	Donation	Acquisition Cost	Larimer Co. Open Lands	Partnerships	Public Access	Comments
Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor							
Long View Farm (Ute/Snowy & One Putt)	478.5		2,465,000	1,232,500	Fort Collins Loveland	821,666 410,833	Yes, future regional trail Working agricultural operation
Long View Farm (Buckner)	120.8		562,000	562,000			Yes, future regional trail Working agricultural operation
Jensen	80.0		316,160	60,000	Fort Collins	256,160	No Managed by Fort Collins—part of Fromme Prairie
Franz	160.0		480,000	120,000	Fort Collins Larimer County	120,000 240,000	No Managed by Fort Collins—part of Fromme Prairie
Williams	8.5	19,650	136,000	136,000			Yes, future conservation park A Part of Fossil Creek Resource Management Area
Front Range Mountain Backdrop							
Coyote Ridge	440.0		924,000	100,000	Fort Collins	824,000	Yes Managed by Fort Collins—part of Coyote Ridge Nat. Area
Coyote Ridge Addition	315.0		693,000	346,500	Fort Collins	346,500	Yes Managed by Fort Collins—part of Coyote Ridge Nat. Area
Coyote Ridge (Steppel)	84.3	21,500	278,500	92,833	Fort Collins	185,666	Yes Managed and monitored by Larimer County
Coyote Ridge (Expansion)	230 (93*)		565,880	565,880			Yes
Blue Mountain Bison Ranch	*4100.0	666,000	2,000,000	1,350,000	GOCO	650,000	No Conservation easement monitored by Larimer County
Devil's Backbone Nature Trail (Wild,S)	138.0	1000	485,520	396,500	Loveland	75,000	Yes, 1999 Managed by Larimer County
Devil's Backbone Nature Trail (Hunter)	247.0		864,500	589,500	S. Short, Loveland	275,000	Yes, 2001 Managed by Larimer County
Devil's Backbone Addition (Golden, L)	6.1		92,500	92,500			Yes Managed by Larimer County
Sylvan Dale Ranch	*444.0	148,750	446,250	271,250	Loveland GOCO	75,000 100,000	Possible future trail connection Preserves viewshed at mouth of Big Thompson Canyon, conservation easement monitored by Larimer County
Estes Valley							
Childers/Henning	*160.0		48,000		Larimer County	48,000	No Conservation esmnt. monitored by Estes Valley Land Trust
Smitherman Ranch	*520.0		520,000	130,000	EVLIT GOCO	130,000 260,000	No Conservation esmnt. monitored by Estes Valley Land Trust
Bickel	0.94		135,000	5,000	Estes Park	130,000	Yes Adjacent to Estes Municipal Center
Lakes Estes Trail	4 mi. ph.III		232,500	100,000	4 Partners	132,500	Yes Managed by Estes Valley Recreation & Park District
Meadowdale/Lion Gulch Trailhead			21,521	10,000	US Forest Service	11,521	Yes Managed by US Forest Service
Lily Lake/Roessler	18.2		400,000	40,000	GOCO, RMPA, Private	360,000	No Managed by Rocky Mountain National Park
Expansions to Regional Parks							
Pinewood (Ramsay-Shockey OS)	177.0	325,000	0	325,000			Yes, 2000 Managed as part of Pinewood Reservoir
Horsetooth Mtn. Pk. (Soderberg)	101.5		460,000	460,000			After Life Estate Future Visitor Center as well as trail access
Horsetooth Mtn. Pk. (Hughey)	282.0	31,000	279,000	129,000	GOCO	150,000	Yes, 2000 Managed as part of Horsetooth Mountain Park
Heinricy	30.0		405,000	90,000	5 partners	315,000	Yes, regional trail Managed as part of Boyd Lake State Park
Easement Acreage Total	5557.0						
Esmnt. & Fee Simple Acreage Total	8474.7		12,810,331	7,204,463		5,916,846	
Improvements to Existing Regional Parks							
South Bay Ramp Expansion			200,000	200,000			Yes Expansion of boat ramp
Satanka Cove Ramp Expansion			200,000	100,000	GOCO, BOR	100,000	Yes Expansion of boat ramp, picnic facilities, handicap access
Regional Park Improvements			550,000	225,000	BOR	325,000	Yes Facility improvement projects to existing reservoirs

* Conservation Easement Acreage

Properties managed by Larimer County Parks & Open Lands

Devil's Backbone Nature Trail Opening a Great Success!

In previous years, the Open Lands Program acquired almost 400 acres of one of the most dramatic Front Range hogbacks – the Devil's Backbone. In 1999, a three and a half mile nature trail was constructed to allow Larimer County citizens to get a first-hand look at the prominent rock outcrop of Dakota Sandstone west of Loveland.



Hikers of all ages enjoyed the opening of the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail.

The Devil's Backbone Nature Trail, preserved with funds from the Larimer County open space sales tax, a grant from the Stryker Short Foundation, and the City of Loveland was built through a combination of staff, volunteers, and donations from First Choice and First National banks. One hundred and forty-four volunteers completed one-third of the trail, donating a total of 750 hours. County parks staff completed the remainder, and kept the project moving ahead on time.

The grand opening of the trail in September 1999, just one year after it was purchased, drew more than 125 nature lovers and volunteers, county commissioners, and members of the open lands board. Visitors enjoyed talking with naturalists who were on hand with information and historical lore about the Backbone.

At the end of 1999, the Larimer County Open Lands Program had preserved over 8,000 acres of land through acquisition and conservation easements. Plans for the future include trail additions, interpretive programs for the public, and more land protection in critical areas as identified by the Open Lands Advisory Board and County Commissioners.

Trail to the New Millennium

The end of the Millennium coincided with the completion, in December 1999, of the Audra Culver Trail. The 282-acre Hughey Property, an expansion to Horsetooth Mountain Park Preserve, was acquired in 1998 as a buffer to the Regional Park Preserve. Hosting a variety of wildlife including deer, mountain lion, black bear, and Abert's squirrel, the Hughey Property also provides important habitat for colonies of the imperiled mottled dusky winged butterfly. When designing and constructing the trail, this important butterfly and wildlife habitat as well as the spectacular views, were considered. The trail was opened to the public in May, 2000.



One of the many spectacular views from the Audra Culver Trail.

Photo by Scott Bacon



Parks & Open Lands Department
1800 S. County Road 31
Loveland, Colorado 80537
970 679-4570