

2013

Larimer County

Natural Resources

ANNUAL REPORT



Visitor Services | Open Lands | Weeds | Forestry





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Photos - Cover:
Charlie Johnson, Top
Right: Greg Mayse,
Top Left: Lucas
Mouffet

Parks Advisory Board: Top

Left to right: Gary Buffington* Ron Kainer, Chris Klaas, Dan Rieves* John Tipton, John Gaffney, David Hattis, Chris Fleming* Steve Ambrose, Shannon Barnes* Front left to Right: Forrest Orswell, Linda Knowlton Not pictured: Russ Fruits, Mark DeGregorio, Frank Gillespie, Rob Harris, Stephanie Sigler,

Land Stewardship Board: Middle

Left to right: Gary Buffington* Tim D'Amato* Chuck Miller, Mike Mason, Ken Mathias, Ernie Marx, Meegan Flenniken* Carmen Weston, Vic Day, Bob Zimdahl, Dave Lentz*

Open Lands Advisory Board: Bottom

Back left to right: Hugh McKean, Paul Alaback, Gary Buffington* Kerri Rollins* Suzan Fritchel, Travis Rollins* Front left to right: Jeffrey Boring* Gerry Horak, Trudi Haines, Nancy Wallace, Ladonna Lee, Carl Sorrentino, Meegan Flenniken* Charlie Johnson* Not pictured: Peter Kast (chair), Mary Banken, John Phipps, Steve Vessey

*Staff

Thank You

To Our Citizen Advisory Boards

From the Director

I am sure that you have heard the famous saying, "You cannot always control what happens to you in life, but you can control how you respond."

Larimer County's response was admirable in its second natural disaster in as many years. The resilience of this County is amazing. Our department staff were among the first responders assisting our citizens and now we are continuing our efforts with restoration and master planning into the future.

We are fortunate to have three volunteer advisory boards sharing their expertise on numerous issues that arise within our parks, open lands and resource programs. These advisory boards are appointed by our Board of County Commissioners who have consistently supported our programs and our professional staff in this department.

Don't forget that the best trails, parks and open spaces are right here in your own backyard! It's why we live here isn't it? So take the kids trout fishing at Flatiron Reservoir, experience amazing views of the Estes Valley from Kruger Rock at Hermit Park Open Space, or explore Red Mountain Open Space up north. So many choices for fun and memories!

Get Outdoors and Play!

Gary K. Buffington, Director
Department of Natural Resources



Photos - Top:Sandy Werkmeister Middle: Casey Cisneros Bottom: Charlie Johnson



Floods: Impact and Recovery

Flooding is an important part of the natural cycles that support our local ecosystems. However, when those events overlap with the built environment, a natural occurrence quickly becomes a crisis demanding an extraordinary response. The torrential rains that hammered our communities for days on end in September created both challenges and opportunities in many ways.

County Rangers Assisted in the Response:

As is the case during most natural disasters and emergencies, County rangers assisted the Larimer County Sheriff and National Guard with the emergency response to the floods. From staffing road blocks and check points, to monitoring the river the rangers were there working alongside emergency responders.

County rangers also monitored the situation at County open spaces to determine when the trails became too wet and muddy to allow visitor access. Most open space trailheads were closed to protect trail resources by the second day of rain, and in some cases took weeks to completely dry out.

Following evacuations, some survivors of the flood were able to take up residence in the County's campgrounds free of charge while they figured out their next steps.

Flood Impacts to Natural Resources Properties:

While the most serious impacts of the disaster were certainly felt by those families and individuals in the path of the flood waters, Larimer County Natural Resources properties did not escape unscathed.

Dirt roads at Hermit Park Open Space in Estes Park were washed out and severely damaged; creating ruts and holes deep enough to stand in without being able to see over the top.

The pocket parks spread throughout the Big Thompson Canyon were inundated as the river rose beyond its banks, with Sleepy Hollow being the only area emerging without significant damage. Glade Park east of the mouth of the canyon was completely scoured out and carried off toward Nebraska, leaving behind only the gate to the area.

Photos: Left to right: Charlie Johnson, Jeffrey Boring, Gary Buffington



Further to the north at Lions Open Space a recently completed river bank restoration project was damaged by flooding in the Cache la Poudre River.

Planning for Recovery:

Larimer County Natural Resources has been working towards recovery from this tremendous disaster. It is clear that with some work and innovation much of the damage can be addressed and the outcomes will be a better experience for everyone. The Department is seeking funding from Great Outdoors Colorado to produce a comprehensive recreation plan for the Big Thompson River Corridor and is a partner in a broader coalition that aims to plan for the continued ecological vitality of the Big Thompson throughout its reach from Estes Park to the South Platte River.

It is difficult to say at this time what shape the recovery will take. Much of the planning to address the impacts of the flood hinges on the success of funding requests from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Great Outdoors Colorado. That being said, visitors can expect that in many cases the Department will

improve opportunities, and reopen Hermit Park Open Space as quickly as possible so that our visitors don't miss out on the best parts of the year for fishing and camping in the Estes Valley.

Impacts to Parks and Open Spaces:

- Hermit Park Open Space roads scoured out by heavy rains
- Forks, Narrows, Sleepy Hollow and Glade parks all significantly impacted due to flooding from the Big Thompson River
- Lions Open Space river bank restoration project damaged



OUR LANDS OUR FUTURE

Recreation & Conservation
Choices for Northern Colorado



Smart planning for the future of the Open Lands Program with a lot of public input will ensure the tax dollars funding conservation and recreation in our county are well spent.

Tom Donnelly, County Commissioner, District 3

Open Lands Master Plan

In 2013, the Larimer County Natural Resources partnered with the cities and towns in Larimer County to complete a comprehensive study of conservation, outdoor recreation and natural resources stewardship in Larimer County. The study, Our Lands-Our Future, examined citizen preferences for outdoor recreation and land conservation priorities, calculated the economic benefits of open space, and developed two tools: an online, interactive mapping tool that identifies high value areas for conservation and a financial model to help outline future funding scenarios for the Open Lands Program.

A major component of the study was a public outreach effort that reached over 4,200 Larimer County residents through surveys, public meetings, presentations, online feedback and focus groups. Results from this outreach indicated that residents are very active in the outdoors, particularly on trails, have a high level of satisfaction with local outdoor recreation amenities, and would like to see these opportunities enhanced. Regarding land conservation, citizens would ultimately like a balance of land conserved for both natural resource values (wildlife habitat, water

protection, etc.) and outdoor recreation. Using the information and tools gained through Our Lands-Our Future, the Natural Resources Department will update the Open Lands Master Plan in 2014. The original plan, adopted in 2001, has served Larimer County well but needs to be revisited periodically in the face of a changing population, land uses, and recreation trends.

Residents expressed interest in:

- Regionally-significant recreation opportunities, such as river and reservoir-based recreation and trails.
- Natural resource and wildlife areas, such as grasslands, wetlands and riparian areas, rivers, ponds and reservoirs.
- Urban settings that provide natural areas, recreation, community character and heritage.
- Working farms and ranches that provide economic benefits and preserve the areas' rural character.

Photos: Left to right: Sue Burke, Harry Strharsky, Rick Price



It's Nice to Feel the Love: Capacity Challenges

Did you know that nearly 100,000 people visited Horsetooth Mountain Open Space in 2013? Some people think those numbers mean an area could be, “loved to death.” This level of visitation presents challenges most often on open spaces located close to cities and towns. This is not the worst problem to have by any means. Larimer County citizens love their parks and open spaces. It is common throughout the year for Horsetooth Mountain, Soderberg, Blue Sky and Devil’s Backbone trailheads to be completely full by 9 a.m. and stay that way all day on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Instead of turning people away the Department looked hard for solutions.

2013 marked a year-long research effort to develop creative and innovative ways to address overcrowding. Through this process we sought feedback from visitors, neighbors, citizen advisory boards and other local agencies. It quickly became clear that there is no ‘silver bullet’ to solve these problems, but rather we are addressing the issues with a suite of options. We redesigned the traffic flow and added more parking spaces to trailheads where we did not feel the trails were overcrowded.

A new webcam at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space trailhead will allow visitors to check for parking from their home computer or mobile devices before driving to the open space. We also got the word out. Rangers are able to communicate real time information from the field to visitors that follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Communication with other local agencies has improved, allowing us to redirect visitors to other areas when our trailheads are full and others are not. As these ideas are implemented, we are creating options for our visitors to improve their experience, and continue to show “the love” for Larimer County parks and open spaces.

Addressing Capacity Challenges:

- Redesigned the traffic flow of trail heads
- Added parking spaces
- Installed a webcam
- Provided real-time information through social media
- Improved communication with our partners to redirect visitors



Camping Just Got a Whole Lot Cooler

The new Airstream in the South Bay campground at Horsetooth Reservoir County Park has charm combined with a contemporary vibe that takes the style from the city and puts it into the wild. The Airstream provides a clean, modern approach to camping unlike a typical experience at a campground. The exterior is iconic Airstream, but when you step inside, everything changes. Fresh colors and sleek metal surfaces create an ultramodern feel. The custom interior, high-definition television and great sound system combine with premium fixtures to create an atmosphere that has 'glamping' written all over it.

If you're looking to get away and still have some of the comforts of home, book a couple of nights in the new Airstream at South Bay.

Airstream Camping at it's Finest:

- Extremely popular in first season
- Two night minimum
- Sleeps 2 adults and 1-2 kids
- Premium accommodations
- Provides an experience for people without their own RV or Trailer
- Reservations recommended

Photos: Left to right: Charlie Johnson, Mark Yoder, Pam Mayhew

Fun! That's what comes to mind when I think of Larimer County's Parks and Open Spaces. We are continually looking for new ways for the whole family to enjoy the great outdoors close to home.
Steve Johnson, County Commissioner, District 2



USA Pro Challenge

The cowbell is simply an interaction between an athlete and spectators offering encouragement and support in a unique way that also saves the vocal chords from the stress of yelling. Cowbells grew in popularity specifically in cheering on Swiss alpine skiers; it's hard to clap while wearing mittens. The use of bells to express fan appreciation grew to other sports with its second biggest use being in professional cycling. This is one out of the thousands of lessons learned in preparation for being a host location for Stage 6 of the 2013 USA Pro Challenge bike race. An estimated 200,000 to 250,000 people watched Stage 6 of the race in person, several thousand of them from road sides at or near local county parks and open spaces. One of the most dynamic locations on stage 6 was along the east side of Horsetooth Reservoir, providing exceptional aerial film coverage on the national ESPN broadcast. Although our staff is accustomed to hosting a "block party" every weekend at the campgrounds, hosting a portion of the course for the international field of champions was an amazing experience. Aside from the ringing in our ears things went off without a hitch.

Volunteer Project Crew

The Volunteer Program created the Volunteer Projects Crew in 2013. The crew is made up of people passionate about helping with trail, clean-up, or restoration projects. The crew assisted with building a log turnpike on the Nomad Trail at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, and restoration projects at River Bluffs Open Space. The projects crew is great for everyone. Visitors pitch in at their favorite protected areas, and the Department makes light work of heavy tasks.



Partnerships for Youth

In 2013, Larimer County Natural Resources engaged in several new partnerships to help create a new generation of kids interested in the outdoors.

Get Outdoors Colorado is a group of agencies and private companies largely focused on building awareness for events and activities that help families get into nature. The Department helped pilot their events clearinghouse website, getoutdoorscolorado.org, and has helped lead the charge for organizations to become partners throughout Northern Colorado. The website offers one-stop shopping for people looking for outdoor programs and nature events, which was an important recommendation from the 2012 Plug in to Nature Study.

The Department also partnered with Big Thompson Elementary School west of Loveland to help the school secure funds from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) to renovate the playground, and turn it into a natural playscape. These kinds of ‘nature playgrounds’ are becoming popular throughout the country for the benefits they offer over traditional playgrounds. This grant helped encourage GOCO to establish a new grant funding cycle aimed specifically at enhancing school yards for experiential learning and nature play.

Field Manager

Every day leaders of commerce and governments are gathering, analyzing and making data driven decisions. Recreation managers are no exception. Recently our ability to “data mine” increased exponentially with our expansion of the use of Field Manager, which will help us make well founded, data driven decisions in the future. Field Manager allows us to gather reservation information in one place where previously we had to compile from several sources. If you want to know how many campers from New Jersey stayed in site S27 on a Tuesday, we can look that up for you.

Photos: Left to right: Christa Ahrens, Harry Strharsky, Charlie Johnson, Scott Hodges



Land Conservation Appreciation Week

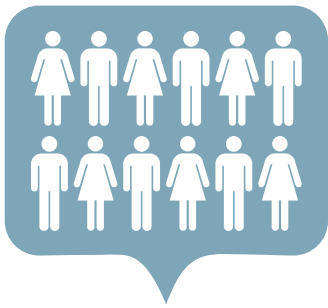
Larimer County Natural Resources participated in Colorado's first annual Land Conservation Appreciation Week in 2013. The initiative, sponsored by the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts, aims to raise awareness about land conservation efforts by local governments and land trusts across the state. The week-long event included National Get Outdoors Day, additional hikes and programs at Larimer County Parks and Open Spaces, and a free day and treasure hunt at Hermit Park Open Space in Estes Park. The treasure hunt was hosted in partnership with the Estes Valley Land Trust, and was a great success with over four hundred attendees. It was a particularly fun event for kids who were able to visit different areas around the Open Space and add booty to their treasure chests at each stop. Visitors also got to learn about all of the special things Hermit Park Open Space has to offer. Land Conservation Appreciation Week is one we can all get behind, because in Colorado, we love our great outdoors!

Mutant Columbine

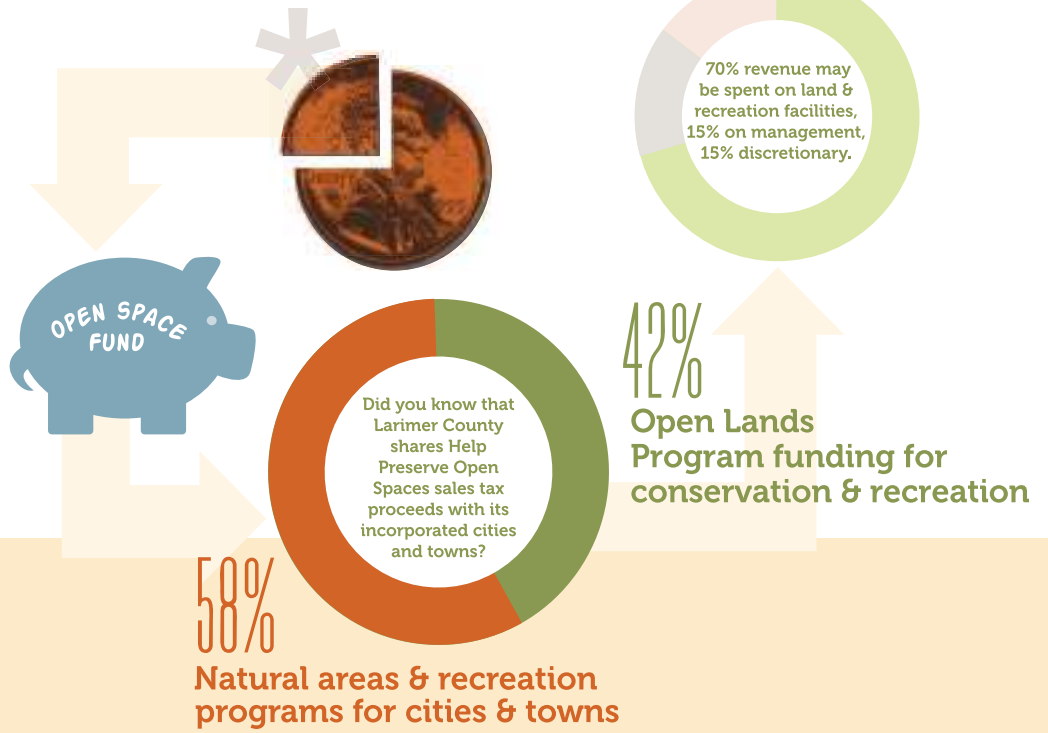
A mutant population inhabits Hermit Park Open Space and Natural Resources staff are thrilled. Columbine comes in many forms and one variety is a striking mutant version of the Colorado state flower *Aquilegia coerulea*.

The mutant columbine variety *daileyae* lacks the characteristic nectar spurs but has an additional set of sepals, or whorls, at the base of the flower.

The reason *Aquilegia coerulea* v. *daileyae* is not well known is that it is very uncommon. This plant has only been observed in Larimer and Jefferson counties and nowhere else on earth...or any other planet for that matter.



A 12-member Open Lands Advisory Board provides citizen oversight of the Open Lands Program and administration of Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax funds.



Tax Revenues

The 1/4-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax revenue is shared with the County's eight municipalities. The tax continues through 2018 and is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is over \$154 million.

Distributions to municipalities are based upon the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation. This revenue sharing agreement ensures that residents throughout the county receive benefits from the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax.

* These figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid-2014. Figures in this chart have been rounded where appropriate.

	Larimer Co	Berthoud	Estes Park	Fort Collins	Johnstown	Loveland	Timnath	Wellington	Windsor
1996	2,259,975	71,154	161,905	2,107,473	—	847,210	4,221	29,848	—
1997	2,485,421	80,969	178,198	2,319,562	—	932,139	4,646	32,520	—
1998	2,707,553	87,574	193,453	2,487,606	—	1,003,872	5,025	40,557	—
1999	3,067,810	101,539	224,779	2,850,066	—	1,146,823	5,732	47,494	—
2000	3,294,869	110,862	222,608	3,109,001	—	1,234,060	5,742	53,444	—
2001	3,565,146	122,889	229,886	3,323,372	—	1,321,205	5,887	64,589	—
2002	3,527,084	124,139	218,802	3,235,748	—	1,304,378	5,599	67,642	—
2003	3,532,580	123,913	218,445	3,205,119	—	1,314,655	7,083	66,730	—
2004	3,750,211	126,810	234,908	3,374,671	9,457	1,405,098	11,480	75,185	17,416
2005	3,811,306	127,480	239,502	3,417,517	8,932	1,432,898	11,684	79,698	20,115
2006	4,033,795	136,930	250,110	3,599,786	11,965	1,506,477	13,196	77,782	13,379
2007	4,152,187	129,513	252,524	3,529,570	34,285	1,554,153	10,563	122,196	54,760
2008	3,956,426	120,359	240,167	3,189,107	38,772	1,470,884	9,121	122,125	55,744
2009	3,614,183	109,178	224,318	2,824,574	45,847	1,410,859	7,103	114,630	49,847
2010	3,920,058	118,288	244,384	3,058,106	55,501	1,558,011	6,746	123,466	59,200
2011	3,734,616	109,266	240,910	2,929,532	56,894	1,445,545	43,851	117,820	64,807
2012	4,485,954	124,545	288,754	3,554,623	75,886	1,740,460	73,910	155,336	113,641
2013	4,777,403	133,751	309,913	3,814,068	74,128	1,904,909	81,646	167,553	124,097
Total	64,676,577	2,059,159	4,173,566	55,929,501	411,667	24,533,636	313,235	1,588,615	573,006
% Total	41.94%	1.34%	2.71%	36.26%	.27%	15.91%	.20%	1.01%	.37%



80 miles of multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking on 10 public open space areas are managed by the Open Lands Program

1/4¢ sales tax is one penny
in Help Preserve Open Spaces
revenue for every **\$4** spent.

That's a  per month
per Larimer
County
household.

*And <50% of the revenue generated
comes from Larimer County residents*

Landowners show support for the
Open Lands Program.
Land donations since 1996 =
\$10.5 MILLION

The Open Lands
Program leverages tax
dollars through grants
and donations.
To date, **47¢** has been
leveraged on every Help
Preserve Open Spaces
sales tax dollar.

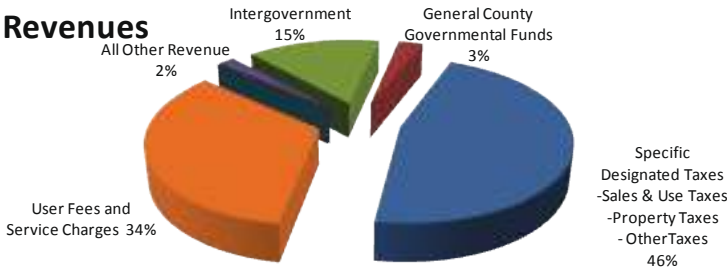
The Help Preserve
Open Spaces sales tax
has generated **\$142**
million in revenue, or
about **\$8.4** million
annually, since 1996.

The Open Lands Program
and willing landowners have
conserved **25,000** acres of
publicly accessible open spaces,
8,000 acres of conservation
easements, and an additional
11,000 acres with local
partners, for a total cost
of **\$33** million.

Our Open Lands Program has been an excellent case of public-private partnerships which provides land owners options to help preserve the historic beauty of our county.”
Lew Gaiter, County Commissioner, District 1

Summary of Finances

2013 Revenues



Larimer County Natural Resources includes the Parks Program, the Open Lands Program and the Weeds and Forestry Programs.

Revenues are realized from a number of sources and totaled \$11.2 million in 2013. Expenses for 2013 were \$8.7 million including a number of one time capital development projects for both Parks and Open Lands.

Major capital projects in 2013 were postponed for a number of reasons including the 2013 Flood.

2013 Expenses



* These figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid-2014. Figures in this chart have been rounded where appropriate.



Capital Improvements & Acquisitions

2013 was primarily a year of planning for future projects. Improvements to campgrounds, checking in with citizens through Our Lands Our Future, and revisiting what is left from the 2001 Parks Master Plan were all major efforts in 2013. The Department's top priority, the completion of the Poudre River Trail, also took a big step forward in 2013 with the acquisition of the Swets trail easement.

The 1/4-mile Swets easement is a critical step in the completion of the Poudre River Trail, which has been a community vision for decades. This portion of the project will connect future sections of the trail with the town of Timnath's recently built "Gateway Trail," soon to be accompanied by a trailhead, on the north side of Harmony Road.

The Poudre River Trail has been in the works since the late 1970s when communities in Larimer and Weld counties began envisioning a recreation corridor along the Cache la Poudre River. Today the trail is nearly complete, with an approximately 6-mile gap between Colorado State University's Environmental Learning Center and River Bluffs Open Space near Windsor. Partners, Fort Collins, Timnath,

Windsor, Greeley, and Larimer County are coordinating to secure funding and complete the regional trail. A successful 2012 Great Outdoors Colorado Grant of \$5.1 million provides funds to acquire additional open space and trail easements along the river corridor and construct additional amenities. Once complete the Poudre River Trail will provide a 44-mile paved route between Bellvue, north of Fort Collins, to Greeley's Island Grove Park. It is anticipated the trail will be complete in 2016.

Larimer County also assisted the City of Greeley with an important conservation easement transaction on the Sheep Draw conservation easement, which will help to buffer the Poudre River Corridor in Weld County. Larimer County will co-hold the easement with the Town of Windsor.

Photos: Left to right: Staff, Pam Mayhew, Christa Ahrens, Mark Yoder



Donations

Major Private Donors of the Open Lands Program

***Donations to Friends of Larimer County Parks and Open Lands**

CE - Conservation Easement

OS - Open Space

Over \$1,000,000	Agilent Technologies (2007) David & Susan Jessup (1999 - 2011) Rob Choen (2005)	Hermit Park OS Sylvan Dale Ranch CEs Cohen CE
\$500,000 to \$999,000	H. A. & Elaine Fonken (2002 - 2006) Jake Kauffman & Son, Inc. (2001) Paul Jonjak & Family (1999)	Fonken CE I - V Kauffman CE Blue Mountain Bison Ranch CE
\$300,000 to \$499,000	Curt & Jennifer Heckrodt (2000) Jack & Beth White (2000) Bob Ramsay (1999)	Red-tail Ridge OS Rimrock OS Ramsay-Shockey OS
\$100,000 to \$299,000	Timnath Farm Investments, LLC (2010) Jim & Beth Crowder (2009) Jim & Christy Bradley (2006, 2009) Eldon & Trulie Ackerman (2004-2005) Cathrine Roberts (2004) Royce Hopkins (2004) The American Legion (2004) Dan Miller & Mary Beth Simon (2002-2003) Larry & Anne Peterson (2002) Patricia Block (2002) Dave Sitzman (2001) Grace Dunkin (2001) Joe & Pat Harper (2000) Joe & Susanne Stephens (2000)	Three Bell I CE Russ Crowder Area at Devil's Backbone OS Bradley CE I, II Ackerman CE I, II Roberts CE Hopkins CE American Legion OS Miller-Simon CE I, II Peterson CE Block CE Kerbel Farm CE Ryan Gulch CE II Harper CE Ryan Gulch CE I
\$5,000 to \$99,000	Roundup Riders of the Rockies (2009, 2011, 2012) C. Miller & Family (2010) Miller-Simon-Bokovoy (2009) Advanced Micro Devices* (2007) Anonymous Doner* (2007) Community Foundation of N. CO* (2007) Erion Foundation* (2007) Hewlett-Packard Corporation (2007) Mark D. Tabb & Julie Vida* (2007) McWhinney Foundation (2007) Microsoft Corporation* (2007) Haines and Colton Charitable Trust* (2007) Verigy Corporation (2007) Whole Foods Markets* (2007) Bryant & Patrica Miller (2006) Charles & Judith Siefke (2005) Southdown, Inc (2001) Miller, Lefthand, & Park Creek Ranches (2001) Robert & Ann Avis (2000) Byron & Beverly Williams (1999) Audra & Don Hughy (1998) Stephanie Steppel-White (1997)	Red Mountain and Hermit Park OS C. Miller CE Miller-Simon-Bokovoy CE Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Hermit Park OS Miller CE Siefke CE Red-tail Ridge Open Space Buckeye Agricultural Partnership CE Eagle's Nest CE Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional OS Horsetooth Mountain OS Coyote Ridge Natural Area

