

# 2015 | Larimer County Natural Resources Annual Report



Visitor Services | Open Lands | Weeds | Forestry



# OUR MISSION

to establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.



Horsetooth Mountain Open Space  
Photo © Zach Schierl

## A LIFESTYLE WE ALL SHARE

Dear Larimer County citizens and visitors,

I feel fortunate to live in a place where people value the great outdoors. Head out to an open space, natural area, reservoir or trail in Larimer County and you'll see individuals and families hiking, boating, biking, fishing, camping and exploring nature. It's why we live here, right?

We have these amazing outdoor places to play thanks to you, the citizens of Larimer County, who have continually voted in support of the Help Preserve Open Spaces 1/4-cent sales tax. For 20 years, funding from Help Preserve Open Spaces has allowed Larimer County and its municipal partners to conserve the special places around our communities. These places have impacted all of our lives, including mine.

Like many of you, I spend my leisure time with my family, hiking, biking and kayaking in Larimer County. My wife and I have raised our kids in the outdoors. It's a lifestyle we all share. I could not imagine living, working or playing in an area where conservation and recreation are not priorities in a community, so thank you for supporting Help Preserve Open Spaces!

In 2016, we're celebrating 20 years of Help Preserve Open Spaces and the impact it's had on all of us in Larimer County with a year of fun and free activities. Please join us in celebrating! Learn about ways you can celebrate with us at [www.larimer.org/openspaces20th](http://www.larimer.org/openspaces20th).

As always, thank you to our professional staff, our outstanding citizen advisory boards and especially to our Board of County Commissioners for your guidance and support.

Get outdoors and play!

**Gary Buffington**

Director, Department of Natural Resources

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## Larimer County Department of Natural Resources 2015 Annual Report

Published: May 2016

Cover photo: Devil's Backbone Open Space © Richard Ernst

Pages 3-4 timeline photos © Patricia Brennan, Jim Disney, Walt Hubis, Charlie Johnson, Harry Strharsky

## Larimer County Government Officials

**Board of County Commissioners:** Lew Gaiter III, Steve Johnson, Tom Donnelly

**County Manager:** Linda Hoffmann

**Interim Public Works Director:** Mark Peterson

# THANK YOU to Our Citizen Advisory Boards

## Open Lands Advisory Board

**Back:** Gary Buffington\*, Ward Nelson, Suzan Fritchel, Kerri Rollins\*, Paul Alaback, Zac Wiebe\*

**Middle:** Sandy Werkmeister\*, Carl Sorrentino, Mary Banken, Meegan Flenniken\*, Lori Smith\*, David Marvin, Peter Kelly

**Front:** Charlie Johnson\*, Chris Fleming\*, Alex Castino\*, Jennifer Miller\*, Nancy Wallace (chair), Commissioner Tom Donnelly

**Not pictured:** Jason Brothers, Trudy Haines, Gerry Horak, Hugh McKean  
\*Staff



Photo © Charlie Johnson

## Parks Advisory Board

**Back:** Gary Buffington\*, Ron Kainer, Dan Rieves\*, Ken Brink\*

**Middle:** Nick Clark, Chris Klaas, Rob Harris, Mark Caughlan\*

**Front:** Stephanie Van Dyken, Frank Gillespie, Deborah Shulman, Russell Fruits (chair)

**Not pictured:** Steve Ambrose, Mark DeGregorio, John Gaffney, Commissioner Steve Johnson, John Tipton

\*Staff



Photo © Pam Mayhew

## Land Stewardship Advisory Board

**Left to right:** Tim D'Amato (retired March 2016)\*, Ernie Marx, Carmen Weston (chair), Ken Mathias, Mike Mason

**Not pictured:** Gary Buffington\*, Casey Cisneros\*, Meegan Flenniken\*, Commissioner Lew Gaiter III, Dave Lentz\*, Charles Miller

\*Staff



Photo © Tim D'Amato



Carter Lake, Photo © Walt Hubis



# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF HELP PRESERVE OPEN SPACES



**Nov. 7, 1995**

Tax passed in Larimer County



**Sept. 11, 1999**

Devil's Backbone Open Space dedicated

**May 20, 2000**

Audra Culver Trail at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space dedicated

**Oct. 5, 2000**

Ramsay-Shockey Open Space dedicated



**April 8, 2005**

Soderberg Trailhead at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space dedicated

2000

2005

**Nov. 1, 1999**

Tax extended until 2018



**Jan. 1, 1996**

Open Lands Program initiated



**March 12, 1998**

Volunteer Program initiated



**Aug. 22, 2002**

Rimrock Trail at Devil's Backbone Open Space dedicated

**Oct. 23, 2004**

Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area dedicated

*"Larimer County's Open Lands Program preserves and protects the natural beauty that so many of us know and love. It also helps secure our farming and agricultural heritage not just for us, but for future generations to come."*

**– Lew Gaiter III,**  
Larimer County Commissioner,  
District 1

*"I find a visit to one of Larimer County's open spaces is the best way to clear my mind of stress and worry and reconnect with the amazing beauty and serenity of Colorado's great outdoors."*

**– Steve Johnson,**  
Larimer County Commissioner,  
District 2

*"What Larimer County has accomplished in the last 20 years thanks to Help Preserve Open Spaces funding is truly remarkable. From the prairies to the mountains, we will continue to conserve the places that make this county so special."*

**– Tom Donnelly,**  
Larimer County Commissioner,  
District 3

In 1995, citizens approved the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax in Larimer County. The successful initiative launched the county's Open Lands Program in 1996 to conserve special places around our communities. Thanks to Help Preserve Open Spaces funding, the citizens of Larimer County have gained new open spaces, natural areas and trails, ensuring the values of these lands exist for generations to come. Thank you, voters!



**June 11, 2005**

Eagle's Nest Open Space dedicated

**June 6, 2009**

Red Mountain Open Space dedicated



**April 16, 2011**

River Bluffs Open Space dedicated

**Nov. 4, 2014**

Tax extended until 2043

**June 22, 2006**

Blue Sky Trail at Devil's Backbone Open Space dedicated

2010



**July 16, 2010**

Crowder area at Devil's Backbone Open Space dedicated

**Oct. 21, 2005**

Lions Open Space and Pleasant Valley Trail dedicated



**Sept. 13, 2008**

Hermit Park Open Space dedicated

**Jan. 1, 2016**

Join us in celebrating the 20th anniversary of Help Preserve Open Spaces with a year of fun, free activities. Learn more at:

[www.larimer.org/openspaces20th](http://www.larimer.org/openspaces20th)

## VALUES OF OPEN SPACES



**Wildlife Habitat**  
conserving homes for birds, fish, mammals and other critters



**Outdoor Recreation**  
providing places for individuals and families to play and explore



**Historic / Cultural**  
preserving important sites, structures and artifacts



**Scenic**  
protecting the amazing views that enliven the body and mind



**Agriculture**  
conserving farms, ranches and a rural way of life



**Community Separator**  
ensuring cities and towns retain their unique identities



# CONSERVING OUR COUNTY'S NATURAL RESOURCES



Members of the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd thunder out of a holding area and onto the grasslands of northern Colorado. Photo © William A. Cotton, CSU Photography

## RETURNING TO THE RANGE

For millennia, bison herds roamed the Great Plains by the millions, until overhunting drove them nearly to extinction. On Nov. 1, 2015, bison resumed their ancestral home on the range on a 1,000-acre, fenced pasture on Larimer County's Red Mountain Open Space and City of Fort Collins' Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

The bison, called the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd, were reintroduced to the shortgrass prairie to cheers from a crowd of several hundred people who gathered to witness and celebrate the historic moment. Native American guests were on hand to bless the animals.

The herd is unique in that it consists of bison from Yellowstone National Park, which have no cattle genes in them. But unlike the herd around Yellowstone, the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd does not have the disease brucellosis, which can be devastating to cattle, thanks to innovative work by researchers at Colorado State University and USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The reintroduction last fall was the result of a partnership among Larimer County, City of Fort Collins, CSU and USDA-APHIS. Thanks to their work, the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd preserves a valuable line of genetics that can now safely be used as a foundation herd for others who want to build herds of bison that carry on the Yellowstone lineage.



Larimer County offers full moon hikes and other night sky programs at Devil's Backbone Open Space, which regularly closes to the public at dusk, as well as other open spaces and parks. Photo © Zach Schierl

## MONITORING THE NIGHT SKY

Have you ever gone camping in the wilderness, looked up at a clear night sky and dazzled at the vast number and intensity of stars? The sight can take your breath away. And it's one worth protecting as light pollution encroaches on natural night skies around our communities in northern Colorado.

Last August, Larimer County partnered with the National Park Service, Boulder County and City of Fort Collins to gather data on the brightness of the night sky at more than 40 locations across the north Front Range. This information will allow Larimer County and its partners to monitor changing brightness levels on their open spaces, parks and natural areas – places where plants and nocturnal wildlife depend on the night sky for survival and people come to gaze in wonder at the Milky Way.

Hermit Park Open Space, Carter Lake and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space are all places open to camping and nighttime visitation, where the number of visible stars is vastly greater than downtown Fort Collins, according to the data collected by staff and volunteers in 2015.

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources will continue to monitor the night sky on its parks and open spaces to protect the night sky's heritage and environmental values. The department is also applying for designation of Red Mountain Open Space as an International Dark Sky Park through the International Dark-Sky Association.

From Horsetooth Rock to the Devil's Backbone, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources stewards some of the most special, iconic places around our communities. The department works with partner agencies, citizens, nonprofit organizations and others to ensure the natural resource values of these places exist – and continue to thrive – for generations to come.

## FLEDGING THE NEST

At Eagle's Nest Open Space, a nest clings to the side of a rock, hundreds of feet above the valley floor. Last year, two golden eaglets perched on the side of this nest, spread their wings and made the plunge, leaving their nest for the first time.

These golden eaglets were two of at least 15 raptors that fledged their nest in 2015 on Larimer County's parks, open spaces and conservation easement lands. Other species of raptors that fledged last year included bald eagles, red-tailed hawks and ospreys. Among them were two ospreys that fledged from a nest platform at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area, the first time this has happened.

Rangers and volunteers monitor raptor nests annually on Larimer County properties to ensure these lands provide healthy habitat for raptors. Monitoring also helps to protect these birds, as rangers must close trails when chicks are observed because human presence can impair their ability to survive.



An osprey perches on a nest platform at Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area in southeast Fort Collins. Photo © Harry Strharsky

## TACKLING A WEEDY YEAR

Last spring was a wet one in Larimer County. Fort Collins received nearly 70 percent more rain than average by May 25, 2015, according to the Colorado Climate Center. All this moisture promoted the growth of weeds, resulting in a big year for invasive, exotic plants in the county.

Larimer County's Land Stewardship Program battled a banner year for Canada thistle, musk thistle, Scotch thistle, common mullein, moth mullein and Dalmatian toadflax and saw spotted knapweed pop up in new areas of Larimer County. Not only did the rain result in robust infestations and earlier seed production, it kept spray rigs idle, since herbicides cannot be applied when plants are wet. To combat the problem, other management techniques were used along with herbicide application, such as releasing insects to help control Dalmatian toadflax.

In 2015, Larimer County continued its partnership with federal, state and local landowners to tackle weeds, collaborated with Colorado State University on field research and tours, and assisted private landowners with plant identification, management recommendations and pasture restoration.



Weed Control Aide Mike Buonpane stands next to a massive Scotch thistle growing near Bellvue. Photo © Steve Priest

## LOOKING AHEAD .....

**This summer, Larimer County will put its three grazing leases back out for public bid. Grazing on open spaces, such as Red Mountain and Eagle's Nest, maintains the ranching heritage of these lands and helps create healthy landscapes through sustainable grazing practices.**

**In 2016, Larimer County is studying the Cache la Poudre River at River Bluffs Open Space, near Windsor, to identify ways to make the river and surrounding lands more resilient during flooding and ensure they provide a healthy habitat for fish, wildlife and native plants.**

**In 2016, Larimer County is expanding its hunting program at Red Mountain Open Space to include pronghorn. Six special access hunting permits for doe pronghorn were offered (draw was held in March) in partnership with the City of Fort Collins and Colorado Parks and Wildlife for use on portions of Red Mountain and the city's Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.**



# ENHANCING AMENITIES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION



Volunteers cut a section of the Besant Point Trail at Pinewood Reservoir. Photo © Pam Mayhew

## SPRUCING UP THE CAMPGROUND AT PINEWOOD RESERVOIR

Pinewood Reservoir is a gem. Located at 6,580 feet, it offers an idyllic location for fishing, hiking, birding, no-wake boating and camping just a short drive from Loveland.

In early summer of 2015, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources opened the remodeled campground at Pinewood Reservoir. Pinewood Campground now features pull-through and back-in electrical sites, walk-in campsites with filtered views of the water, new restrooms, a day-use area and an extended boat ramp. Also, with the help of volunteers, the department's trail crew extended the Besant Point Trail so it now completely circumvents Pinewood Reservoir and connects to the campground.

In spring of 2016, the department finished a nature play area and outdoor classroom at the campground and installed interpretive signs about ospreys and fishing.

Don't forget your fishing rod when you visit Pinewood Reservoir! It's usually stocked with rainbow trout 2-3 times a year and was stocked with several thousand 10-inch tiger muskies last fall.



The group pavilion at Hermit Park Open Space provides a perfect outdoor venue for special events, such as weddings and family reunions, in the Estes Park area. Photo © Jeff Andersen

## UPGRADING THE PAVILION AT HERMIT PARK

The aesthetics of the Hermit Park group pavilion now match the impressive scenery at Hermit Park Open Space in the mountains southeast of Estes Park, thanks to renovations completed last summer.

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources inherited the group pavilion from its previous corporate owners, and it needed a makeover. The pavilion was upgraded with stonework around its columns; new roof, paint and lighting; and a propane fire pit and outdoor kitchen area. Further work planned for 2016 includes revamping the volleyball court and reseeding adjacent areas damaged during the 2013 floods.

The group pavilion at Hermit Park Open Space, nestled in a meadow in the shadow of Kruger Rock with room for up to 175 people, is a perfect locale for weddings, family reunions, company retreats and other special events. Learn more about it and make a reservation at [www.larimercamping.com](http://www.larimercamping.com).

## LOOKING AHEAD

In January, Larimer County broke ground on a new information center at Horsetooth Reservoir. It will serve as a one-stop shop for visitors to the reservoir, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space and other public lands in the area. The center, along with new shop and maintenance facilities, is slated to open in summer of 2016.

Earlier in 2016, Larimer County expanded the parking area at the Devil's Backbone Trailhead, adding more parking spaces. Other planned improvements include a new equestrian and mountain bike trail through the Hidden Valley area, designation of the Wild Loop Trail as hiking only, a webcam on the popular parking area and additional interpretive features.

Larimer County and its partners will build two new paved trails linking Loveland and Fort Collins and each city's existing trail networks. The 4.4-mile Long View Corridor Trail will connect to trail networks on the west side of the cities, while the 2.2-mile Colorado Front Range Trail - Loveland to Fort Collins Connection will link with trails on the east side.



Since 1954, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources has managed outdoor recreation in amazing places across northern Colorado. With input from citizens, the department strives to maintain top-notch amenities on its parks and open spaces, regularly improving its campgrounds, trails, facilities and boat ramps to provide the best possible experience for its visitors.

## BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOTHILLS TRAIL

Snaking along the ridges on the east side of Horsetooth Reservoir, the Foothills Trail is a popular route for trail runners, mountain bikers and hikers. During high water levels last spring, a section of the trail between Rotary Park and Sunrise day use areas eroded into the reservoir.

Out of the collapse came creation: A new, more sustainable segment of the Foothills Trail was born. Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' trail crew and volunteers from In-Situ, Larimer County Horseman's Association, Overland Mountain Bike Club, Team B.O.B. (Babes on Bikes) and C.A.T.S. (Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society) built a new half-mile segment of the Foothills Trail further upslope from the high-water mark.



A wet spring with high water levels at Horsetooth Reservoir led to the collapse of a section of the Foothills Trail. Photo © Josh Weinberg

## EXTENDING THE POUDBRE RIVER TRAIL IN TIMNATH

The Poudre River Trail, a planned 45-mile paved trail along the Cache la Poudre River, is one step (really 4,752 feet) closer to completion. In 2015, a new 0.9-mile section of the Poudre River Trail was constructed east of I-25 through unincorporated Larimer County and the Town of Timnath.

Larimer County, Timnath and Great Outdoors Colorado partnered to build the trail through the historic and one-of-a-kind Swetsville Zoo, connecting to an existing segment of the Poudre River Trail in Timnath. The partners maximized safety by installing two new trail underpasses, one at Harmony Road and the other at County Road 5. Take a trip to Timnath and enjoy the new trail!

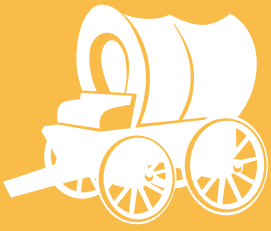


A new 0.9-mile section of the Poudre River Trail meanders along the Cache la Poudre River by the Swetsville Zoo and under County Road 5. Photo © Jeffrey Boring

**Larimer County is building a new horse trailer parking lot at the Soderberg Trailhead, a popular access point for Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. More single vehicle parking spaces will be available in the existing parking lot as well. The upgraded Soderberg Trailhead should be completed by early summer.**

**With the help of volunteers, Larimer County will begin work in 2016 on a new, roughly 6-mile, multi-use trail at Hermit Park Open Space, along with three new trailheads for access.**

**In 2016, Larimer County will stabilize the bank of the Cache la Poudre River, enhance in-stream habitat for fish and fix a washed out section of the Pleasant Valley Trail at Lions Open Space in Laporte.**



# CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE



Visitors participate in a full moon hike at Devil's Backbone Open Space in April of 2015. Photo © Zach Schierl

## EXPLORING THE GREAT OUTDOORS AT NIGHT

When the sun sets, Larimer County's parks and open spaces come alive. Nocturnal critters prowl the landscape in search of food, the moon lightens fascinating geological formations and stars sparkle in seemingly infinite numbers in the night sky.

To engage people in these nighttime wonders, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources offers full moon hikes and astronomy programs on its parks and open spaces. In 2015, the department began hosting night sky photography workshops. People were able to visit Devil's Backbone Open Space, normally closed at dusk, to learn how to capture the brilliant, starry sky on camera.

Most evening programs fill quickly. To stay informed of these offerings, sign up for the department's e-newsletter at [www.larimer.org/naturalresources](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources), or follow the department on Facebook and Twitter.



Alison Dickson (center), the 2015 Visual Artist, led a plein air painting workshop last fall at Soderberg Trailhead. Photo © Zach Schierl

## INTERPRETING OUR PARKS AND OPEN SPACES THROUGH ART

Artists have had a long-standing impact on people's appreciation and awareness of significant places, such as our national parks. Larimer County Department of Natural Resources carries on this tradition through its Visual Artist Program, providing local artists with an opportunity to capture scenic, dynamic protected lands within Larimer County through painting, photography and other visual media.

Last year marked the program's 10th year. Alison Dickson, the department's 2015 Visual Artist, painted a vibrant scene of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space looking east toward Horsetooth Reservoir. Her painting can be viewed outside the Board of County Commissioners Office at the courthouse in Fort Collins. Past artists' works are hung at the Justice Center in downtown Fort Collins.

Applications for the Visual Artist Program open at the end of the year. To learn more about the program, visit [www.larimer.org/openlands/artist.htm](http://www.larimer.org/openlands/artist.htm).

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: 2015 BY THE NUMBERS



360 volunteers donated **21,078 hours of service** to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

**8,968 people** participated in 184 activities including guided hikes, school field trips, campground programs, community events, trailhead tables, trainings and more.



Larimer County Department of Natural Resources conserves lands with an abundance of wildlife, plants, geology and history to discover. The department offers educational and volunteer opportunities for people of all ages to explore and connect with these resources. These opportunities get people into nature and foster a deeper appreciation in them for their parks and open spaces.

## VOLUNTEERING TO BUILD A BETTER LARIMER COUNTY

Volunteers add tremendous capacity to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. In 2015, 360 volunteers donated their time and talents to enhance programs and services: monitoring wildlife, taking pictures, leading education programs, assisting rangers, hosting campgrounds, removing invasive plants, building and patrolling trails, helping at events and performing many other duties.

Last year, volunteers donated 21,078 hours of service to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. Thank you to these individuals, organizations and corporate groups for being such an important part of the department. From the bison reintroduction to the Foothills Trail to the Junior Ranger hikes, volunteers played an important role in many of the successes highlighted in this annual report!



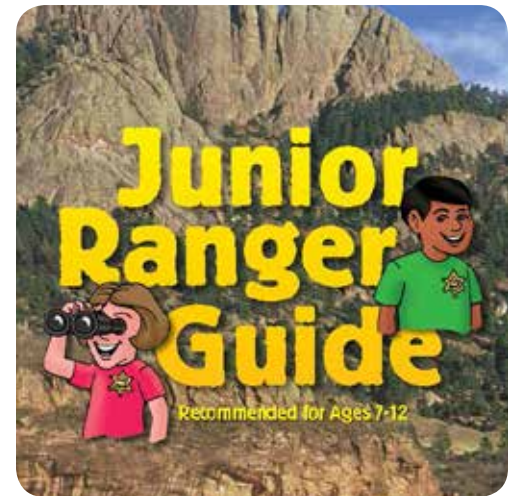
Volunteers assist Larimer County staff with constructing a new section of the Foothills Trail last fall at Horsetooth Reservoir. Photo © Zach Schierl

## DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RANGERS

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources publishes a Junior Ranger Guide for kids ages 7-12. The guide encourages burgeoning young rangers to explore their parks and open spaces by learning about ecology and safety and using their senses to discover the natural world.

In 2015, the department offered guided hikes for Junior Rangers on its open spaces to highlight the guide and help children complete activities in it. These hikes will be offered again in 2016, but kids can start on their path to becoming a Junior Ranger at any time.

To pick up a copy of the award-winning Junior Ranger Guide, visit trailhead kiosks or the department's Administrative Offices in Loveland, or call (970) 619-4489.



In 2015, the Junior Ranger Guide won a meritorious award from the National Association of County Information Officers.

## LOOKING AHEAD .....

**Larimer County will launch a new passport program in 2016** to encourage people to explore all of their amazing open spaces. Posts will be placed on eight open spaces in the county. A unique plaque is affixed to the top of each post. People can “stamp” their passport by making a rubbing of the plaque with a crayon or pencil and collect rubbings to win prizes! Pick up a copy of the passport at open space trailheads starting in late spring, or visit [www.larimer.org/passport](http://www.larimer.org/passport).

**In 2016, Larimer County and a coalition of agencies, school districts and nonprofits will work on the planning phase of a project to connect underserved children in northwest Fort Collins with nature.** The project is part of Great Outdoors Colorado's Inspire Initiative, which gave a \$50,000 grant to the coalition last year to complete the planning process.



# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Anglers fish along the Big Thompson River prior to the 2013 flood. Fishing access was identified as a top priority for desired recreation uses and facilities along the Big T. Photo © Reggie Thurn

## CREATING A BIGGER VISION FOR THE BIG T

In September of 2013, historic rainfall led to massive flooding that devastated communities across the Front Range. One of the most impacted and heavily damaged areas was the Big Thompson Canyon.

In 2014, Larimer County and the City of Loveland received a grant from Great Outdoors Colorado to develop a vision for recreation and conservation in the Big Thompson Canyon. With input from the public, agency partners, the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition and other stakeholders, *A Bigger Vision for the Big T: A Recreation and Conservation Assessment* was released in July of 2015.

The assessment provides a guiding document for rebuilding the Big Thompson Canyon in a healthy, sustainable way and identifies new areas for possible future recreation.

Today, implementation of the plan will largely follow the Colorado Department of Transportation's lead as it works to rebuild U.S. 34 and other infrastructure in the canyon. Sleepy Hollow Park is the only Larimer County park along the Big T to reopen after the flood, for now, as roadwork continues in the canyon.

Visit [www.larimer.org/bigthompsonplan](http://www.larimer.org/bigthompsonplan) to view or download *A Bigger Vision for the Big T*.



Public open houses were held to provide information on the planning effort and gather feedback. The above word cloud represents the desired recreation uses and facilities in the Big Thompson Canyon of attendees of an open house held Feb. 12, 2015 (the larger the word, the higher the priority).

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources engages in thoughtful planning processes to provide focused vision and informed direction for conservation and recreation across the county. With extensive public input, the department works with partners to develop, implement and evaluate plans that ensure it continues to protect our natural resources, conserve agricultural lands and provide outdoor places to play.

## ASSESSING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

Local legend contends a hermit named “Dutch Louie” lived on the land that is now Hermit Park Open Space. He was believed to have lived as a squatter in a cabin on the property, which was once an active cattle ranch, and was hung for rustling cattle.

Alas, while intriguing, not much of the legend is true. Dutch Louie was actually a German immigrant named John L. Jacobi who homesteaded about 160 acres near Kruger Rock and what is now Hermit Park, according to records found during an assessment of historic buildings on Larimer County’s parks and open spaces.

As a steward of important historical places, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources hired a consultant in 2015 to assess older structures on its properties, including foundations, cabins, sheds, a schoolhouse, plaster mill and other buildings. The department learned the history of each one and its historical significance according to criteria from the State Historical Fund. With a plan in place, it is now in the process of assessing the feasibility of stabilizing, preserving or restoring certain structures.

Next time you visit Hermit Park, don’t feel too bad for Dutch Louie. Jacobi had friends, was a successful rancher and died of a hemorrhage of the liver, not a noose.



Historical records refute local legend that a hermit named “Dutch Louie” lived in this cabin at Hermit Park Open Space. Photo © Charlie Johnson

## CLOSING GAPS IN THE TRAIL

The Poudre River Trail is northern Colorado’s longest – and arguably most popular – paved trail. Almost 1 million people walk or cycle the trail every year. Once complete, the trail will run roughly parallel to the Cache la Poudre River for more than 40 miles, from Bellvue, northwest of Fort Collins, to Island Grove Regional Park in Greeley.

Larimer County and its partners are currently working with willing landowners and developers to acquire trail easements and build new segments to close gaps in the Poudre River Trail. One of these gaps that is the responsibility of Larimer County exists between a new section of the trail constructed last year at Gateway Trailhead Park in Timnath and the trail at Larimer County’s River Bluffs Open Space, west of Windsor.

In 2015, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources acquired two trail easements in this area between Timnath and Windsor that will allow for the construction of about 1,200 feet of new trail. The department and its partners also worked with a developer to widen a sidewalk in a development in the area to 10 feet wide so it can serve as a piece of the Poudre River Trail. Today, only about 4,300 feet of trail easements remain to be acquired to be able to connect the trail from Gateway Trailhead Park in Timnath to the existing trail at River Bluffs Open Space, where it continues on to Greeley.



Cyclists ride the Poudre River Trail at River Bluffs Open Space. Photo © Richard Ernst

## LOOKING AHEAD

**In 2016, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources** will start the process of updating its Parks Master Plan. The current plan, last updated in 2007, is nearly complete. For the update, the department will gather public input, look at visitor use trends and identify gaps in recreation needs on a county-wide scale, with a focus on Larimer County’s four reservoir parks and several smaller parks.

**Larimer County received a \$178,000 grant** from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to implement an alternative transfer mechanism (ATM), as recommended by the newly adopted Colorado Water Plan. In 2016, Larimer County is exploring the process for enacting an ATM, which looks at ways to share water across uses without drying up high-quality farmland.

**In 2016, Larimer County expects to** secure in-stream flow rights for Sand and Boxelder creeks on Red Mountain Open Space through the Colorado Water Conservation Board, which would hold the rights. In addition to these waterways, Larimer County is in the process of securing in-stream flow rights for other perennial creeks and streams that flow through its conserved properties.



# COLLABORATING WITH PARTNERS AND LANDOWNERS



This golden eagle soars over a 188-acre property that Larimer County helped the City of Loveland acquire in 2015. A golden eagle nest exists on the property. Photo © Charlie Johnson

## FURTHERING LAND CONSERVATION THROUGH DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

With a county-wide perspective, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is positioned to assist partners across the entire county with projects that advance conservation and recreation. Last year, the department supported projects in nearly every corner of Larimer County. It gave:

- **\$375,000** to the City of Loveland to help acquire a 188-acre property adjacent to existing trails and conserved lands, with public access planned for the property
- **\$75,000** to The Nature Conservancy to help purchase a conservation easement on a 677-acre property in Wyoming adjacent to Red Mountain Open Space
- **\$10,600** to the Estes Valley Land Trust to help cover the transaction costs of accepting a donated conservation easement on a 20-acre property on the eastern flank of Gianttrack Mountain
- **\$50,000** to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy to acquire Cascade Cottages, a 40-acre in-holding in Rocky Mountain National Park; the department challenged the Town of Estes Park and the Estes Valley Land Trust to contribute \$25,000 each, generating a \$100,000 total contribution
- **\$40,000** to the Town of Timnath to build a new 0.9-mile section of the Poudre River Trail (see page 8 of this report)
- **\$4,500** to the Red Feather Lakes Community Library to enhance its outside play and meeting area



Bryant and Patty Miller operate a cattle ranch in Buckeye. The ranch is protected from development by a Larimer County conservation easement. Photo © Danielle Levine

## WORKING WITH LANDOWNERS: BUCKEYE'S CHAMPIONS

The Buckeye area is a small, rural community northwest of Wellington. It's a quiet part of Larimer County, an area that hasn't changed much in nearly 20 years. And that's no accident, thanks to Patty and Bryant Miller and their neighbors.

The Millers have raised two kids and about 300 calves in Buckeye since 1997. Both Bryant and Patty are longtime residents of the area. In the mid-2000s, small acreage lots were proposed in Buckeye, threatening its rural character. Through a grassroots effort, Patty, Bryant and three of their neighbors banded together and purchased more than 600 acres of land. Larimer County assisted in the acquisition by purchasing development rights and placing conservation easements on the land. Instead of the proposed development threatening their rural way of life, the proposal was a catalyst for land protection that united the community.

When asked what's changed since the land and conservation easements were purchased, Patty replied, "Nothing. I still see raptors, deer and coyotes, still hear songbirds and cattle. ... This is the same place we bought almost 20 years ago."

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources monitors the Millers' conservation easement and the other 47 conservation easements it holds annually. These efforts ensure that the conservation values of these lands are protected and allow staff to reconnect with each landowner. In 2015, no conservation easement violations were observed on any Larimer County conservation easement lands.

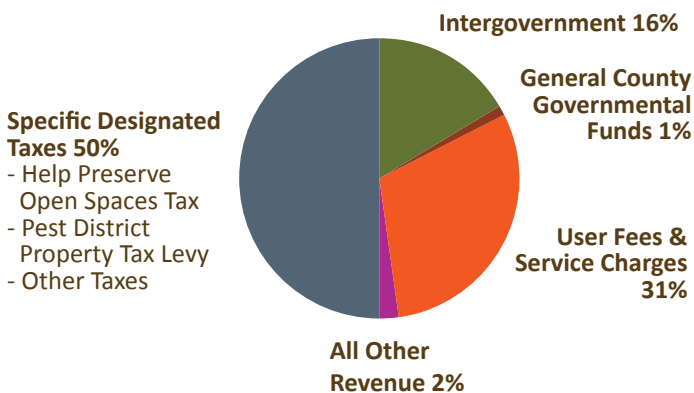


# FINANCIALS

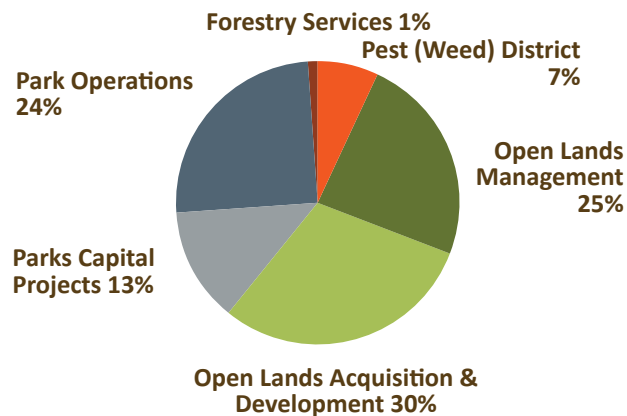
## DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES SUMMARY OF FINANCES

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources includes the Parks Program, Open Lands Program, and Weeds and Forestry Program. Revenues are realized from a number of sources and totaled \$14.8 million in 2015. Expenses for 2015 were \$11.9 million including a number of one-time capital development projects for both Parks and Open Lands. Major capital projects included improvements to campgrounds.

### 2015 REVENUES



### 2015 EXPENSES



\* These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2016.

## HELP PRESERVE OPEN SPACES TAX REVENUES

Revenue from the 1/4-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax is shared among Larimer County and the eight municipalities in the county. The tax was extended in 2014 and will sunset in 2043. It is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is more than \$181 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 Larimer County receive benefits from the Help Preserve Open Spaces tax.

\* These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2016. 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	49,957
2010	3,920,058	118,288	244,384	3,058,106	55,501	1,558,011	6,746	123,466	59,200
2011	4,114,913	120,393	265,441	3,227,847	62,688	1,592,744	48,317	129,817	71,406
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
2014	5,388,708	151,014	347,758	4,289,731	82,150	2,229,709	94,508	190,388	141,199
2015	5,718,927	160,117	366,203	4,555,811	88,500	2,368,947	99,959	202,066	151,192
<b>Total</b>	<b>76,164,509</b>	<b>2,381,417</b>	<b>4,912,058</b>	<b>65,073,358</b>	<b>588,111</b>	<b>29,279,491</b>	<b>512,168</b>	<b>1,963,066</b>	<b>872,106</b>
<b>% Total</b>	<b>41.71%</b>	<b>1.17%</b>	<b>2.67%</b>	<b>33.23%</b>	<b>.65%</b>	<b>17.28%</b>	<b>.73%</b>	<b>1.47%</b>	<b>1.10%</b>

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