

Hermit Park Open Space Resource Management and Implementation Plan



Charlie Johnson

**Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department
November 2007**

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Resource Management Plan for
Hermit Park Open Space

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1-1
1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Plan.....	1-1
1.2 History.....	1-1
1.3 Scope and Organization of the Plan.....	1-2
1.4 Public and Agency Involvement.....	1-2
2. EXISTING CONDITIONS.....	2-1
2.1 Overview.....	2-1
2.2 Natural Resources.....	2-1
2.3 Visual Resources.....	2-3
2.4 Cultural Resources.....	2-4
2.5 Socioeconomic Resources.....	2-4
3. OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS, AND PLANNING ISSUES.....	3-1
3.1 Overview.....	3-1
3.2 Natural Resource Opportunities, Constraints, and Planning Issues.....	3-1
3.3 Outdoor Recreation Opportunities, Constraints, and Planning Issues.....	3-2
3.4 Environmental Education Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues.....	3-3
4. MANAGEMENT PLAN.....	4-3
4.1 Overview.....	4-4
4.2 Natural Resources Management.....	4-4
4.3 Outdoor Recreation Management.....	4-8
4.4 Education Opportunities.....	4-15
4.5 Summary of Implementation Steps and Phasing.....	4-16
5. APPENDIX A: Species Lists.....	5-21
6. APPENDIX B: Deed of Conservation Easement.....	5-1
7. APPENDIX C: Management Zone Descriptions.....	5-21
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	5-1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Plan

Hermit Park Open Space was acquired in February 2007, with the intent to protect the native vegetation and wildlife populations, preserve scenic views, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities. This property was purchased in partnership between Larimer County, the Estes Valley Land Trust, Town of Estes Park, Estes Valley Recreation and Park District, City of Loveland, City of Fort Collins, private donations and in part with funds from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and therefore, is subject to a deed of conservation easement, held by the Estes Valley Land Trust.

The purpose of this document is to: 1) examine the management objectives for Hermit Park Open Space given the current ecological, social, economic, and political environments; 2) provide the formal program and policy guidelines that will direct the management and use of Hermit Park Open Space into the future; and 3) develop specific implementation strategies for carrying out the various components of the management plan and subsequent management efforts. The overall objectives of the plan are to:

- Protect, manage, and enhance natural, cultural, and visual resources including maintaining and promoting healthy ecosystems and their processes;
- Provide and promote safe, enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities while minimizing detrimental impacts upon natural, cultural, and visual resources;
- Provide educational opportunities regarding the values of the surrounding natural, cultural, and visual resources and the importance of responsible use and stewardship of the land;
- Outline project implementation and responsibilities for the above goals as well as provide specific implementation steps as appropriate.

1.2 History

Once part of the Crocker Ranch, Hermit Park Open Space was operated as part of a large livestock operation. The best known history of the Hermit Park Open Space is that it was occupied by a hermit named Dutch Louie who squatted on the Crocker Ranch, and built a 2-storey log cabin around 1910. The structure still stands although Dutch Louie was allegedly hanged for livestock rustling. There is also a one-storey log cabin or line shack still on-site that was used by Crocker Ranch cowboys when they were tending livestock in the area.

The property was purchased by Hewlett Packard (and then deeded to Agilent Technologies, Inc. in 1999) in 1967 and was managed as a private retreat for the company's employees. Hermit

Park Open Space was purchased by Larimer County and its partners in 2007, from Agilent Technologies, and will be managed and operated by the Parks and Open Lands Department.

1.3 Scope and Organization of the Plan

The resource management plan for Hermit Park Open Space contains three main sections: 1) a review of existing conditions, including natural, visual, cultural, and socioeconomic resources; 2) a discussion of opportunities, constraints, and planning issues related to management of the open space; and 3) a management plan addressing the existing conditions, opportunities, constraints, and planning issues and outlining implementation steps and phasing.

1.4 Public and Agency Involvement

Extensive public and agency involvement has been utilized to ensure full representation of those parties interested in Hermit Park Open Space.

Four public meetings were conducted to receive public input (in process). At the first set of meetings, held May 17th 2007 in Estes Park and May 21st 2007 in Loveland, the management plan process was introduced, existing conditions of the property were presented, and the public's visions, issues and concerns regarding Hermit Park Open Space were identified. The second set of public meetings, will be held in August as an open house where copies of the draft management plan will be available for public review. In addition, the draft and final draft plans will both be available on the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department website for month-long review periods.

In addition to public workshops, the draft management plan will be reviewed by the Open Lands Advisory Board, Parks and Open Lands Staff and a technical advisory group (listed below) comprised of various specialists to ensure resource expertise and diverse user group input.

Core Team

- Meegan Flenniken, Resource Management & Planning/Project Manager
- Dan Rieves, Blue Mountain District Management
- K-Lynn Cameron, Recreation and Open Space Planning
- Gary Buffington, Director Parks and Open Lands
- Chris Fleming, Hermit Park Open Space Management

User Groups and Subject Experts

- Joe Andrews, Larimer County Horseman Association (equestrian)
- Ed Seely, Colorado Mountain Club (hiking)
- Barb Allan, Diamond Peaks Mountain Bike Patrol (mountain biking)
- Al Stevens, Good Sams Group (camping)
- Boyd Lebeda, CSFS (forest stewardship)
- Rick Spowart, DOW (wildlife, hunting)

- Doug Robinson, RM Elk Foundation (hunting)
- Scott Roderer, Audubon (birding)
- Stephanie Neid, CNHP (ecology/conservation)
- Jim Pickering, local historian (local history)
- Rodney Ley, CSU Outdoor Adventure Program (rock climbing)
- Andre Duvall, Parks Plan Task Force

Partners and Agencies

- Randy Repola/Bob Josephs, Town of Estes Park
- Bill Pinkham, Estes Valley Land Trust
- Stan Gengler, Estes Valley Recreation and Parks District
- Gary Mathews, Estes Valley Trails Committee
- Kevin Cannon, United States Forest Service
- Larry Gamble, Rocky Mountain National Park
- Deb Eley, City of Loveland Natural Areas Program

Larimer County Staff Subject Experts

- Jerry White, Land Transactions/Planning
- Maxine Guill, Weed Management
- Joel Wykoff, Trails Construction and Management
- Joe Temple, Engineering and Design
- Rick Goltz, Facilities and Maintenance
- Doug Ryan, Health Department
- Tony Simons, Wildfire Safety and Emergency Services

2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.1 Overview

Hermit Park Open Space, comprising 1,362 acres, is located in the Estes Valley, approximately 2 miles southeast of the Town of Estes Park along US Hwy 36 (Figure 1). Hermit Park Open Space was purchased by Larimer County and partners, for its natural, visual and outdoor recreational values.

2.2 Natural Resources

a. Climate

The climate of the Estes Valley, based on 50 years of climate data from the western regional climate center (www.wrcc.dri.edu), can be highly variable. The average maximum daily temperature (F) is approximately 70 degrees or above from June through September, with the daily average maximum reaching approximately 78 degrees in July. Nights are cooler with an average low during the summer of approximately 46 degrees in July. Winters are generally cold but are characterized by temperature swings. January is the coldest month with an average daily maximum of 38 degrees and minimum of 16 degrees.

Average annual rainfall precipitation is 14 inches, with the highest amount of precipitation occurring in July. Average annual snowfall is approximately 33 inches

b. Topography/Geology/Soils

Hermit Park is geographically located in the Southern Rocky Mountains and includes a variety of topographic features including open high meadow grasslands, wetland meadow draws, rounded granite rock outcrops and moderately steep forested slopes. The property ranges from 7,880 feet to the highest point at 8,964 feet in elevation at the western extent with multiple peaks and ridges within the boundary.

c. Hydrology

The headwaters of Big Gulch Creek originate and flow eastward through the property before joining into the Little Thompson River. Small tributaries feeding the mainstem of Big Gulch Creek flow through the large wetland complexes on-site and provide important habitat needs, water, cover and forage, for wildlife. In addition, there are two large wetland communities on the property that were surveyed and ranked by Cooper and Merritt in their 1996 wetlands survey of Larimer County and meet both the Clean Water Act and United States Fish and Wildlife Service definitions of a wetland. In the past 20 years, cylindrical plastic piping or tiles were laid in the upper portions of this wetland to drain the area that is currently developed for the group picnic site.

d. Vegetation

Vegetation types present at Hermit Park Open Space include montane forests and high meadow grasslands bisected by extensive wetland complexes. See Figure 2 for vegetation communities. See Appendix A for a list of plant species identified at Hermit Park Open Space. Approximately 100 acres in the northwest corner of the property has a B2 biodiversity rank by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) due to presence of Rocky Mountain cinquefoil, a rare potentilla.

Montane Forests

The montane forest on Hermit Park Open Space ranges from open stands of ponderosa pine at the lowest elevations to mixed ponderosa pine and Douglas fir at mid-elevations and finally to lodgepole pine at the highest elevations. These montane forests are broken up by pockets of aspen and open meadows and include a diverse array of native understory species including wax currant, mountain muhly, blue grama, alpine timothy, mountain brome, and others.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas

There are two large wetland communities on the property that are important for their highly productive habitat, ecological benefit, and provision of significant vegetation diversity to the Hermit Park landscape. Both wetlands have been surveyed and ranked by Cooper and Merritt in their 1996 wetlands survey of Larimer County and meet both the Clean Water Act and United States Fish and Wildlife Service definitions of a wetland. The southern large wetland is dominated by herbaceous wetland plants (three-square, tufted hairgrass, timothy, rush, sedge, redtop, etc.) and has been ranked “4-high” due to its pristine condition, little sign of human impact, high functional value, large extent and known or high likelihood of sensitive species. The northern wetland/riparian area is dominated by both riparian shrubs (sandbar willow, birch, alder, and snowberry) and herbaceous plants (rushes, sedges, etc.) and has been ranked a “3 – medium” because, while it has pristine condition with little impact, it only has probable habitat for sensitive species.

The additional numerous riparian drainages that bisect the property and feed Big Gulch Creek include more mesic vegetation including cottonwood, plum, aspen, willow and others.

Rare or Endangered Species

The northwest portion of the property is identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program as a “B2” or “high biodiversity significant” site (Figure 2) due to the presence of Rocky Mountain cinquefoil (*Potentilla rupincola*) (CNHP ranking “G2S2”; USFS ranking “Sensitive Species”). Imperiled both globally and state-wide, there are only 23 known populations (19 of which are in Larimer County) of this rare flowering plant in the world. The major threats to this plant include fragmentation or direct loss of plants and weed introductions.

Known Natural Heritage element occurrences at Hermit Park Open Space

Element	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank
<i>Potentilla rupincola</i>	Rocky Mountain cinquefoil	G2	S2

Exotic Plants and Noxious Weeds. Some exotic plants have become established as a result of historic land uses including grazing and introductions from surrounding areas. The current known exotic species at Hermit Park Open Space include Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), mule-ear mullein (*Verbascum Thapsus*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), and smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*). Of these, Canada thistle is on the county noxious weed list and is actively monitored and controlled by the Parks and Open Lands Department. Additional weed surveys and mapping will be conducted in 2007 and 2008. There are some occurrences of mountain pine beetle and mistletoe in small pockets and they have historically been treated by removal of infected trees.

e. Wildlife

The entire Estes Valley Area, including Hermit Park, plays a crucial role in providing wildlife habitat for a variety of species including migratory big game, state threatened species, and globally rare species. An important wildlife feature of Hermit Park is the gap it fills in providing an uninterrupted connection with Roosevelt National Forest and the Meadowdale Conservation Easement lands allowing movement for migratory species and their predators. The sheer size of the connected lands in this corridor provides habitat for wildlife that require intact ecosystems to sustain their habitat needs and home ranges.

Due to the diversity of habitat types on Hermit Park Open Space, the property supports a variety of wildlife including elk, deer, great-horned owl, Aberts' squirrel, Colorado chipmunk, mule deer, mountain lion, bobcat, moose, black bear, vole, amphibians, butterflies, songbirds, raptors, and many other species (see Appendix A). The Division of Wildlife shows Hermit Park as prime elk severe winter range and part of a major elk migration corridor north to south and east to west.

Rare or Endangered Wildlife

The property has the potential to support the state imperiled boreal toad (*Bufo boreas boreas*) (CNHP ranking "G4S1" – globally common, state rare; and State of Colorado "T1" ranking - "threatened"), statewide vulnerable wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*) (CNHP ranking G5S3 – globally secure, state vulnerable; and USFS "Sensitive" ranking) and a state special concern species, the northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*). While an amphibian survey conducted in July 2007 resulted in no species found, the potential habitat does exist on-site to support these species.

2.3 Visual Resources

Hermit Park provides a scenic backdrop to US Highway 36, the main access corridor from the Front Range to Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. The spectacular open meadows and forests interspersed with meadows visible from US Highway 36 create an appealing backdrop for visual aesthetics. On a clear day, Longs Peak, Twin Sisters and Kruger Rock are visible from Hermit Park. Unique and interesting rock outcrops dot the landscape throughout Hermit Park and create a feeling of isolation and solitude within the property. There are a few structures on the open space that are within view corridors including those in the open near the group use area and the flag pole atop a rock outcrop near the Line Shack.

2.4 Cultural Resources

Once part of the Crocker Ranch (of the Crocker Biscuit Company), Hermit Park Open Space was operated as a large livestock operation. The best known history of the Hermit Park Open Space is that it was occupied by a hermit named Dutch Louie who squatted on the Crocker Ranch, and built a 2-storey log cabin around 1910 (Figure 3). The structure still stands, mostly in its original condition, although Dutch Louie was allegedly hanged for livestock rustling. There is also a one-storey log cabin or line shack still on-site that was used by Crocker Ranch cowboys when they were tending livestock in the area (Figure 3).

An archaeological survey was completed by the State Historical Society throughout the property and within proposed trail corridors on USFS lands in July 2007. Nine sites and 9 isolated finds were recorded during the survey. No prehistoric materials were found and only two definite flakes and flake-like fragments were found. Most sites were late 19th or early 20th century ranching sites including two standing buildings—a line shack and the Hermit Cabin of "Dutch Louie." Also recorded were a few dugout features, prospect pits, trash deposits, and several "barrier fence" segments where barbed wire was strung between rock outcrops to prevent stock animals from accessing the rugged terrain above the meadows.

The property was purchased by Hewlett Packard (and then deeded to Agilent Technologies, Inc. in 1999) in 1967 and was managed as a private retreat for the company's employees. Hermit Park Open Space was purchased by Larimer County and its partners in 2007, from Agilent Technologies, and will be managed and operated by the Parks and Open Lands Department.

2.5 Socioeconomic Resources

a. Hermit Park Open Space Land Status

Larimer County and partners acquired the 1,362-acre Hermit Park Open Space for \$6.5 million in February 2007. The landowner, Agilent Technologies, sold the property for a discounted price to Larimer County. Two Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grants were awarded for the purchase: \$500,000 from the Open Space Grant Cycle and \$200,000 from the Local Government Grant Cycle. The property is subject to a conservation easement held by the Estes Valley Land Trust, with some oversight by the Board of Great Outdoors Colorado.

Buildings and Recreational Amenities

The site currently has a number of facilities and amenities developed during Hewlett Packard's and Agilent's ownership (Figure 3). These amenities include 15, 350 square foot (s.f.) log camper cabins with decks, outdoor fire grates, picnic tables, bunk beds, small cabinet with counter space and propane heaters, cook stoves and lights; 5 camping areas with a total of 75 campsites (each equipped with fire grate and picnic table); 3 granite vault toilets; a corral area with a water tank; a 40-acre group picnic area (including a band stage, volleyball court, large picnic shelter, shower house with flush toilets, outdoor kitchen/grill with propane cook stoves, a large charcoal grill, a walk-in cooler, refrigerator, two large storage garages, concession stand, playground structures, picnic tables, horseshoe pits and a large generator); two historic cabins; and, an 8,000 gallon dump station for recreational vehicles. Also on-site near the entrance are a

~2,000 s.f. caretaker's house (3 bedroom, 1 bathroom, living room, office, deck and 2-car garage), a large 1,536 s.f. maintenance garage with storage and office space, and a 1,122 s.f. storage building/wood shop all serviced with electricity, well water, septic system and phone service.

Trails

Currently, there are approximately 3 miles of natural surface trails on the property. Two of the trails lead onto Roosevelt National Forest and connect to either the 12-mile Homestead Meadows Trail System or lead to the summit of Kruger Rock (see Figures 1 and 3). Trails within Hermit Park Open Space are being evaluated for their sustainability and for their fit within a larger recreation planning framework both on-site and with the USFS as well as their locations and impacts to sensitive plant and wildlife species.

Roadways and parking

There are nine miles of gravel access roads within Hermit Park Open Space. The roads are generally in good condition, although they need some drainage work and resurfacing to meet county standards. There are two, two-track access roads, one leading into the Meadowdale Conservation Easement lands to the northeast and the other to the southeast onto USFS lands. There is no public access on either roadway, however in the event of an emergency, Larimer County will be working on a memorandum of agreement so responding personnel and emergency vehicles can access through the Meadowdale Conservation Easement.

Fences and Corrals

Most of the property perimeter is not fenced. There is a short section of wood rail fencing along US Highway 36 and a log entrance feature with a metal laser cut "Hermit Park" entrance sign. There is an 8-stall horse corral at the headwaters to the northernmost wetland/riparian area with two stock tanks.

Water and Mineral Rights

Water rights. There are no water rights associated with the property although the property has two functioning water wells. One is located near the caretaker's house and the second, which is seasonal due to freezing, is located near the pavilion.

Mineral rights. A remoteness letter has been obtained for the property, indicating that the potential for commercial mineral extraction is so remote as to be negligible. Mineral rights on approximately 80-acres of Hermit Park are retained by the U.S. government for fissionable materials (primarily uranium).

Encumbrances

There are no exceptions to the title commitment that are of concern.

Environmental Assessment

A Phase I Environmental Assessment was completed (Environmental Resources Management, 2006). There were no significant issues or problems found on the property.

b. Adjacent Land Use

Surrounding lands are a combination of large private lands, private lands protected with conservation easements and Roosevelt National Forest (Figure 1).

Hermit Park Open Space is predominantly bordered on the south and portions of the east and west by Roosevelt National Forest, providing continuity of these protected lands. The Homestead Meadows trail system, an approximately 12-mile natural surface trail system leading to historic homestead cabins, lies to the south and is connected by trail to Hermit Park. To the north and remaining east and west portions, there are large private lands. Meadowdale Conservation Easement lands (two separate conservation easements held by Estes Valley Land Trust) are along portions of the north boundary and northeast boundary. The property is bordered in part along the north boundary by US Hwy 36.

c. Access, Circulation and Traffic.

U.S. Hwy 36 provides access to Hermit Park Open Space. The existing access to Hermit Park pre-dates the existence of the state highway access code, so while it is an existing and legal access, there is no current access permit. Larimer County will apply for an access permit. Highway 36 is a two-lane highway with traffic traveling northwest/southeast between Lyons, CO along the Front Range and the Estes Valley.

d. Public Facilities, Utilities and Services

Fire protection. Hermit Park Open Space is served by the Estes Park Fire Department located at 901 N. St. Vrain.

Electricity is available to the manager’s residence on Highway 36, provided by the Town of Estes Park. A diesel powered generator provides electricity to lights and a walk-in refrigerator at the group use area.

Public safety. Larimer County Parks and Open Lands ranger staff are responsible for regulation and law enforcement at Hermit Park Open Space. However, Larimer County Sheriff’s Department and other law enforcement agencies are available to assist in responding to emergencies and preventing criminal activity. Parks and Open Lands staff also provide visitor assistance and emergency and medical needs. The Estes Park Ambulance Service responds to more serious medical emergencies while the Larimer County Search and Rescue team of the Sheriff’s Department conducts rescues.

e. Recreational Use and Demand

All of Colorado’s Front Range communities are under increasing demand for development, and Larimer County is no exception. According to the 2000 Census, the population of Larimer County has grown 35% over the last ten years, this is 5% higher than the average growth rate for the entire state. This rapid growth in a single area not only demands conversion of lands for single family dwellings, but also for infrastructure such as schools, roads, office buildings and stores to accommodate these residences. The Estes Valley is a premiere gateway community to Rocky Mountain National Park. Much of this valley is surrounded by both the National Park and Roosevelt National Forest and has seen 9% growth over the last five years. Small acreage residential subdivision is a great threat to the character of the Estes Valley and the prime location

of this property would provide highly desirable “rural” homes that are conveniently accessible from the Town of Estes Park as well as the cities of Loveland, Lyons, Longmont and Boulder.

It is estimated that at full capacity the site will have approximately 50,000 visits annually (Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department 2007). A visit is defined as the entry of any person onto the property for any time period. A same day re-entry is considered a single visit. It is predicted that July will receive the highest number of visits (approximately 8,100), while January will have the lowest number of visits (approximately 825). The majority of visits will take place between Friday and Sunday. The Parks and Open Lands Department will have 2 full time staff and 3 seasonal staff assigned to Hermit Park Open Space, as well as a number of volunteers (e.g. camp hosts).

f. Operations Budget and Funding

Hermit Park Open Space will be self-sufficient and all operations, management activities, and capital improvement projects will be funded entirely through user fees collected on-site. Based on projections, annual management costs for this area are anticipated to be ~\$330,000.

Management costs include rangers and regulation enforcement, general facility maintenance, weed management, administration, trash removal, education, trail maintenance, and vegetation management and restoration. It is intended that fees collected on site for day use, camping, cabin rental and rental of the group use area will cover projected management costs, and along with grants also cover capital improvement costs.

3. OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS, AND PLANNING ISSUES

3.1 Overview

During the management plan development process, input was received from the public, a Technical Advisory Group, and the Open Lands Advisory Board concerning opportunities, constraints, and planning issues relating to the existing conditions and management of Hermit Park Open Space [**In Process**]. These issues may be divided into three key components: 1) natural resources, 2) outdoor recreation, and 3) education.

3.2 Natural Resource Opportunities, Constraints, and Planning Issues

- *Protect, manage, and enhance natural resources including maintaining and promoting healthy ecosystems and their processes.*

Natural resource opportunities include:

- Maintaining and enhancing the natural vegetation communities on-site, including restoring sections of the wetlands and maintaining a sustainable, healthy forest.
- Maintaining high quality wildlife habitat and movement corridors to enable the continued use of the area by wildlife such as raptors, bobcat, moose, elk, etc.
- Allowing hunting will be an important tool to help control numbers of elk on the property as well as maintaining a healthy and sustainable ecosystem.

Constraints and planning issues associated with the natural resources of the property include the following:

- Open space users may disturb wildlife, in particular elk who utilize this area as severe winter range and migratory corridor.
- Elk may use Hermit Park as a refuge in large numbers and cause impacts to vegetation.
- Tracking elk hunting numbers and take (i.e. sex, age, and number of animals) will be important for responsible and adaptive hunting management.
- Dogs off-leash may disturb wildlife as well as impact user experiences.
- Wetlands may be affected by: increased sedimentation loads, exotic weeds from increased visitation, vehicle oils, dust from the roads and overgrazing from elk.
- Relocating cabins and campsites that are currently located in proximity to the wetlands or other sensitive areas will assist in protecting these resources.
- Introduction of additional exotic weed species from construction activities, horse manure, and increased visitation is a concern.
- Existing and increasing infestations of mountain pine beetle on Hermit Park Open Space and surrounding USFS lands is a concern for forest health and fire danger.
- Removing the existing trail and avoiding further disturbance within the Rocky mountain cinquefoil community will help protect this population from fragmentation and weed introduction.

- Off-trail use may cause soil erosion.

3.3 Outdoor Recreation Opportunities, Constraints, and Planning Issues

- *Provide, promote and enhance safe, enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities while minimizing detrimental impacts upon natural, cultural, and visual resources.*

Outdoor recreation opportunities include:

- Constructing an on-site trail system and providing connections to USFS trails will provide outdoor recreation, environmental education, and wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Providing additional recreational opportunities at Hermit Park Open Space will help meet increasing public demand for diverse recreation experiences in the Estes Valley.
- Providing a large day use area for events such as weddings and company picnics.
- Maintaining the visual corridor along U.S. Highway 36.

Constraints and planning issues regarding outdoor recreation include the following:

- Multiple use of the trails may result in user conflicts.
- Designating specific trails and/or portions of trails as hiking-only may ease user conflict, minimize soil erosion in steep areas as well as decrease the introduction of non-native plant species from horses.
- A trail design addressing user needs and interests may conflict with a trail design protecting sensitive plant species and communities.
- Social trails, users traveling off-trail, and multiple access trails could be destructive to natural resource values.
- Relocating or redirecting trails that lead to private property will minimize the number of users trespassing onto adjacent private lands.
- Dogs on leashes will minimize impacts to other visitors.
- Too many people may impact the enjoyment of the open space by all.
- Balancing the carrying capacity of the open space between overnight users, day use visitors as well as large groups is essential in maintaining visitor satisfaction and providing a high quality experience.
- Over-signage may be a visual eyesore to visitors.
- Providing safe access to Hermit Park Open Space per Colorado Department of Transportation requirements from US Highway 36 will minimize safety issues.
- Hunting and animal retrieval will be on foot or horseback to decrease the disturbance to sensitive wildlife.
- Hunting may be a safety issue for adjacent landowners and the public.
- Separating tent camping from RV camping will provide a more high quality experience for both user groups.
- Designating equestrian campsites outside of sensitive resource areas may reduce the spread of non-native plants, avoid trampling, and provide for a high quality equestrian experience.

- Providing an extended reservation window or other consideration to Larimer County residents will be considered to help to ensure county residents have a better chance to experience Hermit Park Open Space.
- Facility layout and appearance(s) may affect user satisfaction of the area's aesthetic value.
- Providing accessibility to cabins and restrooms for disabled visitors will provide higher quality experience for this user group. Additional recreation opportunities such as trail and hunting access for disabled visitors will be implemented where feasible.

3.4 Environmental Education Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues

- *Provide and enhance educational opportunities regarding the area's natural and cultural history and visual resources and the importance of responsible land use and stewardship.*

Environmental education opportunities include:

- Developing and implementing a formal education plan for Hermit Park Open Space, including natural resource, cultural resource, and recreational ethics topics.
- Providing for educational programs and talks at a future rustic group seating area.
- Engage volunteer assistance with management activities such as trail building and maintenance, weed management, on-site naturalists as well as camp and trail hosts.
- Providing and engaging the Estes Valley community in education programs.

Constraints and planning issues regarding environmental education are:

- Over-signage of the trailhead and trail may reduce the natural character of the site and create eyesores.
- Creating a boardwalk to the historic line shack may minimize impacts to the bordering wetlands while providing an additional educational opportunity.
- Interpreting the Hermit's Cabin which is not structurally sound in an engaging manner from the outside will be a challenge.
- Educating area visitors about the importance and sensitivity of the wetlands may reduce the impact to this sensitive community.
- Educating hunters as to regulations and other topics may pose a challenge to determine how to best engage this user group.
- Locating a seating area to best provide programs to both day and overnight users without creating conflicts to either user group may be a challenge with the current layout of the site.
- Providing informational signs including educational topics, regulations for the site and other information at all points of access (trailheads, campgrounds, etc.) will be important.

4. MANAGEMENT PLAN

4.1 Overview

To meet the management vision and conservation easement provision for management of Hermit Park Open Space and to address opportunities, constraints and planning issues brought forth by the public and technical advisory group, the plan is divided into three main components: 1) natural resource management; 2) outdoor recreation management; and, 3) education opportunities. These three components while addressed separately, are interrelated and will likely impact and influence each other. In addition, the plan includes a summary of steps to implement the management plan for Hermit Park Open Space.

Vision

The vision for Hermit Park Open Space is to provide a “backcountry” experience in a “frontcountry” location. The property offers significant and unique montane habitat and recreational opportunities. With its scenic vistas, open space characteristics, significant wildlife, vegetation and rare plant habitat, educational opportunities, and well-managed recreational amenities, the open space offers a place where humans can relax, reconnect, and recreate in a sustainable manner within the natural environment. To meet this vision, Hermit Park Open Space will be planned and managed in a manner that protects, preserves, and celebrates the property’s open space, scenic views, wildlife, native and rare vegetation and other aesthetic, ecological, educational, and recreational values.

Seventy-five percent of the property is designated as “open space” with the intent to protect natural and cultural resources, habitat and viewsheds and with no developed features except trails and trailheads, and twenty-five percent managed as “parklands” with developed campsites, camper cabins, group camping and picnicking areas, and roadways (Appendix B: Conservation Easement). Management zones (as shown on Figure 4 and defined in Appendix C) will be used to denote appropriate activities, levels of use and visitor expectations for the site. Offering public access to Hermit Park Open Space will enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in the Estes Valley and present an opportunity for local citizens and tourists alike to enjoy Hermit Park Open Spaces’ spectacular natural beauty. This open space will fill an important niche in the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands portfolio by combining camper cabins and campgrounds with multiple use recreational opportunities. While the open space will allow public access, permitted uses on any portion of the property will not have an adverse effect on the natural environment as it presently exists. A balance between the protection of natural resources and providing public access will be obtained through careful planning and management of the site and will help ensure the conservation of resources into the future.

4.2 Natural Resources Management

Natural resource management addresses the health and dynamics of the plant and wildlife communities and the protection of natural features at Hermit Park Open Space. For purposes of this plan, natural resource management is grouped into three categories: a) vegetation health and management; b) wildlife management; and c) hydrology management.

a. Vegetation Management

Vegetation health and management identifies practical management alternatives and strategies for maintaining the native plant communities and ecosystem functions and reducing the impact of non-native species at Hermit Park Open Space. The primary vegetation communities of focus will be the montane forest, wetlands and the Rocky Mountain cinquefoil population. Sustainability of native plant communities is highly dependent on natural processes that have established these communities. Proper management depends on plans remaining adaptive and flexible. Changes to plans should be based on current conditions rather than pre-determined programs that do not account for fluctuations in conditions such as drought, fire, etc.

The montane forest on Hermit Park Open Space ranges from open stands of ponderosa pine at the lowest elevations to mixed ponderosa pine and Douglas fir at mid-elevations and finally to lodgepole pine at the highest elevations. These montane forests are broken up by pockets of aspen and open meadows and include a diverse array of native understory species. There are numerous down and dead trees on the southern and western boundaries and into USFS lands from past infestations of western spruce budworm. This defoliating insect eats needles of spruce, Douglas fir, and other fir species in its caterpillar stage and was prevalent in the area in the 1980's. To maintain a healthy forest defined as a diverse species composition, age classes and structure, management activities will include the use of mechanical thinning and/or prescribed burning. A forest stewardship plan will be developed in partnership with the Colorado State Forest Service to further evaluate the current conditions of the forest and strategize phasing and management actions. Any structures within the forested areas of the property should meet wildfire-defensible zone recommendations including removing flammable vegetation within 15-feet from structures, avoiding stacking firewood within 30-feet and locating propane tanks away from structures as feasible.

The main extensive wetland on the property is ranked 4-“high” (Cooper and Merritt 1996) due to its pristine condition, little sign of human impact, high functional value, large extent and proven or high likelihood of sensitive species, and is dominated by herbaceous wetland plants (three-square, tufted hairgrass, timothy, rush, sedge, redtop, etc.). This wetland has been impacted from past management and development activities on-site including an access road that bisects the wetland, campground #5 at the wetlands southeastern end, the main access road to campgrounds #3 and #4 which parallels the wetland on the south boundary and two cabins that are in close proximity. The road and campground #5 will be removed and restored. In the short-term the two cabins (Madrona Point and Bear Claw) will be walk in access. Over time, the two cabins will be evaluated for relocation to eliminate using the road east of campground #4 and thereby minimize impacts to the wetland from dust, sedimentation, weeds and oils. The northern wetland/riparian community is dominated by both riparian shrubs (sandbar willow, birch, alder, and snowberry) and herbaceous plants (rushes, sedges, etc.) and has been ranked a “3 – medium” because, while it has pristine condition with little impact, it only has probable habitat for sensitive species. The primary management goal for these wetland areas will be to restore an approximately 5-acre area south of the group use area that was tiled to drain portions of the wetlands, maintain the hydrologic function of the wetlands and their source areas, and prevent and/or control non-native species.

Rocky Mountain cinquefoil (*Potentilla rupincola*) is a globally and state-wide imperiled plant (CNHP ranking “G2S2”; USFS ranking “Sensitive Species”) with only 23 populations (19 of

which are in Larimer County) known of in the world. The major threats to this plant include fragmentation or direct loss of plants and weed introductions. There is currently a campground (campground #1) with 29 sites, internal roads and a short trail loop that is within the cinquefoil population. The main management actions to protect and conserve this rare species will be to avoid any further fragmentation or disturbance of the plant within its population boundary (see Figure 2) and to eliminate the existing loop trail to mitigate weed introduction into the population by trail users.

Implementation Steps:

- Inventory non-native weed species and incorporate Hermit Park Open Space into the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Integrated Pest Management Plan.
- Contract with the Colorado State Forest Service to develop a forest stewardship plan to further evaluate the current conditions of the forest and strategize phasing and management actions.
- Implement forest management activities including mechanical thinning and/or prescribed burning.
- Complete wildfire-defensible zone management recommendations around all structures including removing flammable vegetation within 15-feet from structures, avoiding stacking firewood within 30-feet and locating propane tanks away from structures as feasible.
- Restore and improve wetland areas that were tiled by removing tiles, revegetating the road bisecting the wetland, revegetating campground #5 and, over time, eliminating the road east of campground #4.
- Maintain the hydrologic function of the wetlands and their source areas by avoiding fragmenting wetlands from sources or re-channeling water for other purposes.
- Regularly monitor the Rocky Mountain cinquefoil population and wetlands community for weed incursions and fragmentation by recreation or other activities.
- Avoid any further fragmentation or disturbance of the Rocky Mountain cinquefoil within its population boundary and to eliminate the existing loop trail to mitigate weed introduction into the population by trail users.
- Revegetate old roads and disturbed areas (including campsites or other features that are relocated) on the property using native grass seed mix.
- Monitor the species composition, age class and structure of the montane forest community by developing sample plots.

b. Wildlife Management

The Estes Valley, including Hermit Park Open Space, plays a crucial role in providing wildlife habitat and movement corridors for a variety of species including migratory big game, state threatened species, and globally rare species. In particular, the Division of Wildlife designates Hermit Park Open Space as prime elk severe winter range and part of a major elk migration corridor north to south and east to west.

To help manage overpopulation and congregation of elk within Hermit Park Open Space, and minimize the associated impacts such as over-browse and disease, an elk hunting program will be developed in partnership with the Division of Wildlife. The hunting plan will become an addendum to this plan and outline safety measures to avoid user conflicts as well as delineate off-limit areas to hunting. To minimize negative interactions with large ungulates and other wildlife species on-site, dogs will be required to be on a leash at all times.

A bird survey was conducted weekly over a six-week period in spring 2007 (see Appendix A). Over 57 bird species were observed, however there were no rare avian species. The existing bluebird boxes on-site are too closely spaced and have not been maintained to prevent incursions by non-target species (such as house sparrows). Due to the high level of maintenance and monitoring required, these bluebird boxes should be removed and not replaced unless there is a monitoring and maintenance plan developed and staff or volunteers assigned to complete this effort.

Consequently, the trails, trailheads, roads, parking, campsites, cabins, and other recreation areas at Hermit Park Open Space will be carefully located to minimize impacting sensitive wildlife species, primarily those corresponding to the wetland and riparian areas. Specifically, trails will be focused to the west and south portions of the open space to avoid bisecting the main riparian habitat in drainages flowing east from the open space and correspond to wildlife movement corridors. Bear-proof trash containers will be installed.

Implementation steps:

- Locate roads, parking, campsites, cabins and other recreation facilities outside of sensitive resource areas and within the 25% parklands as appropriate (Figure 4).
- Design trailheads and trails to avoid impacts to sensitive resource areas and wildlife movement corridors.
- In partnership with the Division of Wildlife, develop an elk hunting plan and leases for animal management and health that includes provisions for public safety and resource protection.
- Remove all and do not replace bluebird boxes on-site unless a formal monitoring plan and staff or volunteers to complete the maintenance/monitoring are in place.
- Conduct an annual spring bird survey to track the use of Hermit Park by migratory and resident bird species
- Estimate the size of the elk population during the peak of winter to determine if Hermit Park continually provides severe winter elk habitat.
- Install bear-proof trash containers.

c. Hydrology Management

The wetlands and riparian areas on Hermit Park Open Space have been impacted hydrologically from past management and development activities on-site. The primary hydrology enhancement goal for these wetland areas will be to restore areas where drain tiles have been installed south of the group use area to maintain the hydrologic function and connectivity of the wetlands to their source areas. At the headwaters of the northernmost riparian/wetland area there currently are

livestock/horse corrals that were used by equestrian visitors to Hermit Park Open Space. Because of their location along the riparian area, these corrals will be removed.

Soil erosion is a major threat to ecosystem health and subsequently may impact wildlife values and water quality. A combination of the steep slopes and impervious surfaces at Hermit Park Open Space make the site susceptible to high runoff during precipitation events with potential soil erosion and sediment movement. The site will be managed to maintain adequate vegetative ground cover to prevent erosion and to minimize or reduce denuded areas in proximity to the wetlands where sediment loads will cause a substantial negative impact.

To minimize the potential for trail erosion, the proposed trail system will be designed to follow natural topographic contours. Trails will be monitored regularly in order to detect any significant sign of soil erosion. In addition, trail users will be encouraged to remain on designated trails to prevent development of social trails and subsequent erosion. The road within the wetlands and road paralleling the wetlands below campground #4 will be restored to minimize sediment input and flow into this sensitive area.

Implementation steps:

- Eliminate existing livestock/horse corrals located in the riparian area.
- Do not further fragment or disturb wetland/riparian areas with any new roads, trails, or other features.
- Restore and enhance wetland areas that are tiled by removing tiles, revegetating the road bisecting the wetland, revegetating campground #5 and, over time, eliminating the road east of campground #4.
- Monitor trail conditions on a regular basis to check for erosion and trail deterioration.
- Require users remain on designated trails.
- Use Parks and Open Lands Department staff and volunteer on-site naturalists to monitor and encourage proper trail use and etiquette.

4.3 Outdoor Recreation Management

Recreation management generally refers to the management of people and outdoor recreational facilities. For purposes of this plan, recreation management is grouped into three categories: a) recreational facilities development and management, b) trail construction and maintenance, and c) multiple use and user interaction. The site currently has a number of existing structures and recreation-based amenities developed during Hewlett Packard's and Agilent's ownership. As part of the acquisition of the open space, a conservation easement was placed on the property to ensure protection of natural, cultural and recreational resources and to define allowable areas and structures for recreation expansion on-site (see Appendix B: Deed of Conservation Easement). Proposed modifications and/or new construction will be phased in over time as funding is secured in order to meet required public standards for these capital improvements. Figure 4 shows the location of existing and proposed facilities and trails as well as management zones that will be used to delineate the types and levels of use within specific areas of the open space.

a. Recreational Facility Development and Management

Currently many recreational facilities exist on the property. To comply with the terms of the conservation easement, protect natural resource areas, provide high quality recreational experiences, and programmatically connect facilities, there are a number of modifications that must be made. See Map 5 for the adopted site plan showing future facilities, parking, and programming infrastructure to be developed over the long-term at Hermit Park Open Space.

Cabins

Currently there are 15, ~350 s.f. log camper cabins built between 1968 and 2000 that include such features as decks with railings, outdoor fire grates, picnic tables, propane heaters, lights and cook stoves, small cabinet with counter space and bunk beds. All of the cabins have been inspected by the Larimer County Building Inspector to determine compliance with building codes. A series of modifications will be needed before opening to the public including replacing deck railings, adding smoke detectors, putting propane tanks on blocks, inspecting all propane furnace lines, etc.). Currently, Bluebird Cabin is ADA accessible. It is required and desirable to modify a second cabin (likely Big Gulch Cabin) to meet ADA accessibility standards. Previously, all cabins were individually serviced by leased port-o-lets. Larimer County will be installing individual or common vault toilets over time to service the cabins.

Per the conservation easement, there is an allowance to construct five additional camper cabins. Three of these new cabins will be 350 s.f. in size and two can be up to 1,000 s.f. in size with the intent to keep all cabins rustic in nature (see Appendix B: Conservation Easement). There are two existing cabins (Madrona Point and Bear Claw) that are located adjacent to the wetlands that over time will be relocated away from the wetlands, but still within the 25% designated parklands. The easement also identifies 25% of the land within Hermit Park Open Space where these new cabins and replacement or moving of existing cabins can occur. The total number of cabins within the open space will not exceed 20.

Campgrounds

The existing five campgrounds include a total of 75 campsites (each equipped with fire grate, picnic table and parking space). Many of the campsites are located with excellent views, tucked in amongst rock outcrops and separated from adjacent campsites. However, there are some campsites that are located in close proximity to sensitive resource areas (particularly campgrounds #1 and #5), other campsites that are less sustainably built in that they are on slopes or poorly defined. Per the conservation easement, an additional 20 campsites can be constructed and any of the 75 existing campsites that need to be relocated can be located within the 25% parkland areas. The final total number of campsites within Hermit Park Open Space will not exceed 95 sites.

A combination of both tent and RV camping will be provided at Hermit Park Open Space, a site plan will evaluate how to separate these two uses to avoid conflicts and noise complaints because of generator use. The maximum length of stay, per the conservation easement and current County regulations, for campers is 14 days.

In each of campgrounds #1, #3 and #4 there are existing vault toilets. The vaults are concrete-lined and meet County building codes. Additional vault toilets need to be installed within campgrounds #1 and #2 to meet capacity needs and to be more centrally located within 3 years of opening to the public. Also, within campgrounds #1 and #2 as feasible, building a shower house for campers is desirable.

In the long-term, and based upon demand, equestrian campsites will be designated, likely at camp area #3, each allowing up to 2 horses/site. Corrals will not be provided, however a hitching post may be constructed per the conservation easement, or users may be required to tie horses to trailers. The equestrian campsites will likely be located in campground #3 and away from sensitive vegetation areas to minimize weed incursions within native plant communities and separated from non-equestrian campers. Equestrian campers will need to provide their own water or fill water upon arrival at the open space for horses.

In the long-term, group camping at campground #4 (that also can be reserved by individuals) will be provided. In the past, Good Sams Club and other camping groups were allowed to camp within the wetlands where there was a large enough open area to circle 15-20 RV's, however due to the sensitivity of the wetlands and goal of protection of this community, group camping will not be allowed in this area.

Group Use Area

Mostly developed in the 1970's, the approximately 40-acre group use picnic area includes a number of facilities including a band stage, volleyball court, large picnic pavilion, shower house with flush toilets, outdoor kitchen/grill with propane cook stoves, a large charcoal grill, a walk-in cooler, refrigerator, two large storage garages, concession stand, playground structures, picnic tables, horseshoe pits and a large generator. These structures were inspected by Larimer County and a number of modifications are required including designating the well as a public water source, rebuilding or renovating the shower house to meet ADA and other building code requirements, adding handicap parking spaces, removing or modifying the bandshell to meet building code, and complete inspection and replacement of fuel lines to the walk-in cooler.

The main programming intent for the group use area includes day and evening group use activities such as weddings, family reunions, company picnics or meetings, and other group events consistent with the terms of the conservation easement. The carrying capacity of this area will be set at 200-300 people per event to ensure a high quality experience that meets the overall vision defined in this plan and the conservation easement intent of this open space. To meet the needs associated with the above uses and capacity, a second pavilion will be installed in the future, the shower house removed, a flush restroom with changing area built, appropriate parking areas will be built and the two larger (1,000 s.f.) cabins will be constructed in this vicinity. All future facilities will be constructed per the site plan following approval by Larimer County and the Estes Valley Land Trust per the conservation easement and with approved building permits.

The bandshell, playground and concession stand will be removed, and sold if possible, since they do not fit the character or a recreational need of the site, are in the viewshed, and in large part do not meet the current health or building codes. The existing horseshoe pits that are within the

wetlands will be either removed or relocated. The flag pole atop the large rock outcrop near the Line Shack will be removed.

Caretakers Residence and Maintenance Area

The caretaker's house (3 bedroom, 1 bathroom, living room, kitchen, office, deck and 2-car garage with workspace) is a 2-story ~2,000 s.f. building constructed in 1969 and is in good condition. Also in this vicinity is a large 1,536 s.f. maintenance garage with storage and office space (built in 1986), a 1,122 s.f. storage building/wood shop (built in 1975) and a small gasoline shed. The house and garages are serviced with electricity, well water, septic system and telephone. These buildings were inspected in 2007 by the Larimer County Building Inspector to determine compliance with building codes. The primary modifications required include updating the house furnace, insulating the pipes in the house garage, adding railings to the wood shop stairs, designating the well as a public water source via the State Health Department, removing the gasoline shed, and providing fire separation between office and garage space, etc.

Larimer County intends to hire an on-site caretaker to live in the house. In the short-term, the office space in the large maintenance garage will be used by staff as a base of operations. Over the long-term, per the conservation easement a 3,000 s.f. visitor center may be constructed in this vicinity and could include such facilities as offices, large meeting space, maintenance area, public restrooms/showers, visitor reception area, displays, and parking. Limitations to activities at this future building primarily preclude use of a commercial nature (see Appendix B: Conservation Easement). Also in the long-term the existing maintenance building will be removed and an updated facility constructed behind the caretakers house, out of sight of Hwy 36.

Historic Structures

The two historic cabins on the property, Hermit's Cabin and the Line Shack, are of cultural interest. Following a building inspection, it has been determined that the Hermit's Cabin is not structurally sound to allow public access. It is intended that in conjunction with a trailhead at this location, the Hermit's Cabin will be interpreted from the outside. As feasible, the structure should be maintained in its existing condition or better to prevent interior or exterior damage or collapse. The conservation easement includes a provision for constructing a small education seating area on-site and may potentially be located in this vicinity to provide an educational venue in proximity to both day-use (trailhead and Hermit's Cabin) and night-use (cabins and campgrounds #1 and #2) areas. The Line Shack needs repairs to the timbers supporting the porch, however it is structurally sound and will be used for educational purposes, specifically in conjunction with a future boardwalk from the group use area (see Section 4.4 Educational Opportunities).

Utilities and Signs

At the entrance to Hermit Park Open Space, there is an 8,000 gallon RV dump station and clean out area. This tank needs inspection to ensure no leakage and if in compliance will be maintained in its current location. Over time this tank will be replaced as needed.

To meet public drinking water standards, the two wells on-site (caretakers house and group use area) will need to be designated as public water sources through the State of Colorado. The water system at the group use area meets code, however the system at the caretakers house needs

a larger storage tank to meet code. Required system improvements will be made to meet state standards and required paperwork will be submitted to the State of Colorado to designate both wells as public water systems.

Extensive directional and regulation signs are currently posted throughout the open space. Many of the signs are routed wood with painted letters and in good condition. Over time as these signs are damaged or become weathered, they will be replaced with signs matching Larimer County Parks and Open Lands standards for durability and cost-effectiveness. The entrance sign off of US Highway 36 will be re-designed for better visibility.

Roads and Access

Hermit Park Open Space is accessed from US Highway 36, a two-lane state highway between Estes Park and Lyons, Colorado. The Colorado Department of Transportation, is requiring a left-hand turn lane be constructed on US Highway 36 for vehicles turning into the open space from the east, and a right-hand turn lane striped within the existing pavement for vehicles turning into the open space from the west.

There are nine miles of gravel access roads within the Open Space. The roads are generally in good condition, although they need some drainage work and resurfacing to meet county road standards. There are two, two-track access roads, one leading into the Meadowdale Conservation Easement lands to the northeast and the other to the southeast onto USFS lands. Larimer County will work with Meadowdale Ranch for an emergency access easement through their property to provide a secondary access to Hermit Park Open Space for responding emergency and fire personnel and evacuation purposes.

At the entrance area, there is need for event or overflow parking for users of the group area. This parking area will include parking, a shelter and a vault toilet.

Trailheads

There are currently three trailheads that consist of pull-off denuded areas along the roadways. To provide day-use trailheads that connect with the future trail system, up to four trailhead parking locations may be developed (Figure 5). The locations of the proposed trailheads were chosen to minimize visual and environmental impacts, while tying into interpretive features (such as the Hermit's Cabin) and the larger trail system. The trailheads will provide parking (including ADA accessible spots), vault toilets, picnic tables and informational kiosks. At the saddle area trailhead, there will be a small footprint wider area off a short trail loop to accommodate small capacity events (~15 people). No lighting will be used in the trailhead areas. Equestrian trail access will be provided at an equestrian trailhead associated with campground #3 where equestrian camping will be provided in the long-term.

Day-use, campsite, cabin and group use/special event area fees will be charged at Hermit Park Open Space to cover all costs of site management and land stewardship activities. A Larimer County Annual Parks Permit will apply. In the short-term, the existing entrance station building near Highway 36 will be used to collect entrance fees. Over the long-term there is provision within the conservation easement language to allow for a 3,000 s.f. visitor center building in this vicinity that could also serve this purpose.

Implementation steps:

- Complete all county building code requirements on all structures to ensure compliance, including ADA accessibility.
- Complete all county review processes for future developments (including site plan and special reviews) and obtain building permits.
- Install vault toilets associated with cabin and campground areas within 3 years of the public opening.
- As needed, construct up to an additional 5 camper cabins and relocate any cabins located in sensitive or problematic areas.
- Evaluate the demand for walk-in access to the Madrona Point and Bear Claw cabins vs. relocating them elsewhere.
- As needed, construct up to an additional 20 campsites and relocate existing campsites in sensitive or problematic areas.
- Remove and restore campground #5 and the roadway between campgrounds #4 and #5 adjacent to the wetland.
- Construct a gate to prevent vehicle access beyond campground #4.
- Construct a second pavilion, flush toilets, seating area and parking for the group use area per an approved site plan between the Estes Valley Land Trust and Larimer County.
- Remove the existing bandshell, shower house, concession stand, flag pole and playground.
- Relocate horseshoe pits outside of wetland area.
- Build a small rustic seating area/outdoor classroom for educational programs.
- Complete all state requirements to meet public drinking water standards for both on-site wells and for permitting for septic systems.
- Build required turn lanes on US Highway 36 and improve the entryway to allow vehicles adequate pull in room.
- Replace existing directional and regulation signs as needed.
- Improve the main roads within Hermit Park Open Space as needed to meet County Road Standard G and campground/cabin loops to meet specified county requirements.
- Complete emergency access easement with Meadowdale Ranch.
- Construct trailheads with associated amenities including vault toilets and kiosks.
- In the long-term construct an equestrian campground based on demand.
- In association with the Saddle Trailhead, allow for smaller weddings of ~15-20 people in this vicinity.
- As feasible and needed in the future, construct a visitor center within the 25% park improvements area near US Highway 36.

b. Trail Construction and Maintenance

Currently there are approximately 3 miles of natural surface trails on the property. Two of the trails lead onto Roosevelt National Forest and connect to either the 12-mile Homestead Meadows Trail System or lead, via a very steep route, to the summit of Kruger Rock. The existing trails within Hermit Park Open Space have been evaluated and many are not built sustainably, lead to or cross private property boundaries, or are within the Rocky Mountain

cinquefoil rare plant population boundary. In evaluating the larger recreation planning framework for the open space, many of the existing trails will be eliminated and reclaimed, however some of the trails will remain as part of the internal trail system.

The proposed trail system for Hermit Park Open Space (see Figure 4) will consist of approximate 5 miles of natural surface trails within the open space boundaries. Conceptually, this trail system will follow the north, west and south property boundary connecting to the four trailhead areas. No trails were designed along the east boundary of the open space to avoid fragmenting the riparian corridors that flow west to east from Hermit Park to Meadowdale Ranch. Connecting trails to USFS lands will be constructed to both Kruger Rock and the Homestead Meadows area. Larimer County will complete all National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements with the USFS to ensure compatibility with environmental and cultural requirements to construct the trails on USFS lands. The approximately 1 ½ -mile trail to Kruger Rock is a relatively short trail that loops around the rock outcrop and is anticipated to be highly popular. Due to the high amount of use and the upper portions of the trail not being conducive to mountain biking or equestrian use, this trail will be designated as hiking-only to minimize conflicts and congestion. The trails will be aligned to minimize conflicts between users and sensitive resources (wetlands, rare plants, wildlife, etc.), avoid close proximity to private lands, provide high quality recreation experiences and scenic vistas, and minimize erosion potential.

To provide access to the Line Shack while minimizing impacts to the wetlands, a short ¼ -mile boardwalk will be constructed from the group-use area. Section 4.4 (Educational Opportunities) described educational opportunities associated with the boardwalk and Line Shack.

Implementation steps:

- Construct 5 miles of natural surface trails within Hermit Park Open Space using Larimer County staff and volunteers.
- Perform on-going trail maintenance as needed.
- Complete the NEPA Process and permit application to the USFS and construct the 1 ½ -mile trail to Kruger Rock for hiking-only access.
- Construct a ¼ -mile boardwalk from the group use are to the Line Shack.
- Revegetate and restore existing trails that are not part of the approved trail system.
- Develop appropriate signs to clearly mark open space boundaries and to prohibit trespassing onto private property.

c. Allowable Uses and User Interaction.

The trail system at Hermit Park Open Space will be natural surface (with the exception of a ¼-mile boardwalk) and open to such recreational uses as hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, running and wildlife viewing. Winter use activities including cross-country skiing and snowshoeing will be allowed on designated trails as feasible based on snow accumulation. In the winter months, the water will be shut off, however to the extent feasible and cost-effective, roads will be plowed to allow access to cabins, campsites and group use facilities. The trails at Hermit Park Open Space will be open for day use from dawn to dusk, with the exception of ranger-led hikes or supervised environmental programs in the evening. Visitor courtesy and trail etiquette will be promoted through education programs by staff and volunteers.

The trail to Kruger Rock will be approximately 1 ½ miles out and back and connect into the larger on-site trail system at Hermit Park Open Space. It is anticipated that this relatively short trail will be very popular and to minimize user conflicts and congestion and ensure a high quality recreation experience will be designated as hiking-only.

No commercial uses will be allowed at Hermit Park Open Space with the exception of catering for group use events and allowing a horse stable operation to drop off horses on occasion for non-commercial equestrian use. Dogs will be allowed at Hermit Park Open Space, but will be required to be on a leash at all times. Larimer County will work with adjacent landowners regarding trespassing issues.

Implementation steps:

- Promote trail and multi-use etiquette through clearly marked information signage and/or brochures.
- Designate the Kruger Rock Trail as hiking-only.
- Provide signs indicating dogs must be kept on a leash.

4.4 Education Opportunities

Numerous educational opportunities exist at Hermit Park Open Space and allow for the development of an integrated education program. Because this property is adjacent to USFS lands there is the potential to coordinate environmental education opportunities within this larger framework.

Potential environmental education subjects include wetland ecology, rare plants, habitats and wildlife in the area, large wildlife movement corridors, local history, astronomy, and geology. Other educational opportunities include showcasing resource management activities, trail and hunting etiquette and safety, interpretation of the vegetation communities and rare species, and the vision of the Open Lands Program, among others.

Future education facilities at Hermit Park Open Space include a small seating area centrally located to both day and night use areas. The construction of a short boardwalk trail will provide an opportunity to interpret the wetlands and offer access to the historic Line Shack. The Line Shack will host educational and interpretive opportunities related to the natural, cultural, and recreational significance of Hermit Park Open Space.

Implementation steps:

- Develop an education plan for Hermit Park Open Space that includes main interpretive themes and appropriate personal and non-personal means to communicate them and in conjunction with future facilities on-site.
- When conducting forest management, restoration or other resource management projects, incorporate these activities in interpretive talks, printed materials, etc.
- Include educational materials at the trailhead including signs, brochures, etc.

- Provide educational opportunities at the Hermit's Cabin and Line Shack.
- Education of hunting and non-hunting publics to minimize user conflicts.
- Work with other agencies and local organizations to coordinate educational and interpretive programs.
- Incorporate Hermit Park Open Space into the Departmental Volunteer Naturalist Program.

4.5 Summary of Implementation Steps and Phasing

A tabular summary of implementation steps and proposed timelines are provided below. These steps will be prioritized and implemented in a timely manner.

Summary of Implementation Steps for Hermit Park Open Space

Hermit Park Open Space Implementation Steps	Cost Estimate	2007	2008	2009 and beyond	Oversight/Managing Program
Vegetation Management					
Inventory non-native weed species and incorporate Hermit Park Open Space into the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Integrated Pest Management Plan.	\$2,000		X		Weed Program
Contract with the Colorado State Forest Service to develop a forest stewardship plan to further evaluate the current conditions of the forest and strategize phasing and management actions.	\$3,500		X		Open Lands Program/CSFS
Employ such management activities as the use of mechanical thinning and/or prescribed burning.	\$900/ac		X	X	Parks Program/ Open Lands Program/ Emergency Services
Complete wildfire-defensible zone management recommendations around all structures including removing flammable vegetation within 15-feet from structures, avoiding stacking firewood within 30 feet and locating propane tanks away from structures as feasible.	\$0 (2007 grant received through CSFS)	X			Open Lands Program/Emergency Services
Restore and improve wetland areas that were tiled by removing tiles, revegetating the road bisecting the wetland, revegetating campground #5 and, over time, eliminating the road east of campground #4.	\$5,000		X		Parks Program/Open Lands Program
Maintain the hydrologic function of the wetlands and their source areas by avoiding fragmenting wetlands from sources or re-channeling water for other purposes.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program
Regularly monitor the Rocky Mountain cinquefoil population and wetlands community for weed incursions and fragmentation by recreation or other activities.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program
Avoid any further fragmentation or disturbance of the Rocky Mountain cinquefoil within its population boundary and to eliminate the existing loop trail which will avoid weed spread into the population from trail users.	2.5 miles x \$2/linear foot to restore trail	X			Parks Program/Trails Program
Revegetate old roads and disturbed areas (including campsites or other features that are relocated) on the property using native grass seed mix.	\$50,000			On-going	Weed District/Open Lands Program

Hermit Park Open Space Implementation Steps	Cost Estimate	2007	2008	2009 and beyond	Oversight/Managing Program
Wildlife Management					
Locate trails, trailheads, roads, parking, campsites, cabins and other recreation facilities outside of sensitive wildlife areas.	N/A	X	X	X	Parks Program/ Trails Program
In partnership with the Division of Wildlife, develop an elk hunting plan and leases for animal management and health that includes provisions for public safety and resource protection.	N/A		X		Parks Program/ Open Lands Program
Remove all and do not replace bluebird boxes on-site unless a formal monitoring plan and staff or volunteers to complete the maintenance/monitoring are in place.	\$150 to remove or volunteers	X			Parks Program
Hydrology Management					
Remove livestock/horse corrals from riparian area.	\$500 or volunteers	X			Trails Program
Do not fragment or otherwise disturb wetland/riparian areas with any new roads, trails, or other site features.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program
Monitor the trail condition on a regular basis to check for erosion and trail deterioration.	N/A			On-going	Trails Program
Require users remain on designated trails.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program
Use Parks and Open Lands Department staff and volunteer on-site naturalists to monitor and encourage proper trail use.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program/ Volunteer Program
Recreational Facility Development and Management					
Complete all building code requirements on all structures to ensure compliance, including ADA accessible structures.	\$16,000	X			Open Lands Program/Trails Program
Complete all county review processes for future developments and obtain building permits.	N/A	X	X	On-going	Parks Program/Open Lands Program
Install vault toilets associated with cabin and campground areas.	\$25,000 ea.			X	Parks Program/Construction Program
As needed, construct up to an additional 5-camper cabins and relocate any cabins located in sensitive or problematic areas	\$100,000 ea.			X	Parks Program/Construction Program
Evaluate the demand for walk-in access to the Madrona Point and Bear Claw cabins vs. relocating them elsewhere.	\$25,000 to relocate			On-going	Parks Program/Construction Program

Hermit Park Open Space Implementation Steps	Cost Estimate	2007	2008	2009 and beyond	Oversight/Managing Program
As needed, construct up to an additional 20 campsites and relocate existing campsites in sensitive or problematic areas.	Variable			X	Parks Program/Construction Program
Remove and restore campground #5 and the roadway between campgrounds #4 and #5 adjacent to the wetland.	\$50,000			X	Parks Program/Weed District
Construct a second pavilion, flush toilets and parking for group use area.	\$500,000			X	Parks Program /Construction Program or Contractor
Remove the existing bandshell, playground, shower house, flag pole and concession stand.	\$20,000		X		Parks Program /Construction Program
Build 2 small groups seating areas for educational programs or ceremonies at the group use area.	\$25,000			X	Parks Program /Construction Program
Complete all state requirements and paperwork to meet public drinking water standards for both on-site wells and for permitting for septic systems.	N/A	X			Parks Program/Open Lands Program
Build required turn lanes on US Highway 36 and improve the entryway to allow vehicles pull in room.	\$250,000		X		Parks Program/Contractor
Replace existing way finding signs as needed.	\$50/sign			On-going	Parks Program
Improve roads within Hermit Park Open Space as needed to meet County Road Standard G.	\$260,000		X	X	Parks Program
Complete reciprocal emergency access agreements with Meadowdale Ranch.	N/A	X			Open Lands Program
Construct trailhead areas and associated amenities including vault toilets and kiosks.	\$250,000 ea.			X	Parks Program/Construction Program or Contractor
As feasible and needed in the future, construct a visitor center and overflow parking.	Future			X	Parks Program/Open Lands Program
Allowable Uses and User Interaction					
Promote trail and multi-use etiquette through clearly marked information signage and/or brochures.	\$50/sign		X	On-going	Parks Program
Designate the Kruger Rock Trail as hiking-only.	N/A		X	On-going	Parks Program
Provide signs indicating dogs must be kept on a leash.	\$50/sign		X	On-going	Parks Program
Trail Maintenance and Construction					
Construct ~5 miles of natural surface trails within Hermit Park Open Space.	\$5/l.f.	X	X	X	Trails Program
Perform on-going trail maintenance as needed.	\$2.50/l.f.			On-going	Trails Program
Complete the NEPA Process and permit application to the USFS and construct the 1 ½ -mile trail to Kruger	\$5/l.f. to construct	X			Open Lands Program/ Trails Program

Hermit Park Open Space Implementation Steps	Cost Estimate	2007	2008	2009 and beyond	Oversight/Managing Program
Rock and connecting trail through USFS lands.					
Construct the ~1/4-mile boardwalk across the northwest corner of the wetlands to the Line Shack.	\$8,000			X	Trails Program
Revegetate and restore existing trails that are not part of the newly defined trail system.	\$2/l.f.		X		Trails Program
Develop appropriate signs to clearly mark open space boundaries and to prohibit trespassing onto private property.	\$15/sign	X			Parks Program
Education Opportunities					
Develop an education plan for Hermit Park Open Space that includes main interpretive themes and appropriate personal and non-personal means to communicate them and in conjunction with future facilities on-site.	In-house		X		Education Program
When conducting forest management, restoration or other resource management projects, incorporate or showcase these activities in interpretive talks, printed materials, etc.	N/A			On-going	Education Program
Include educational materials at the trailhead including signs, brochures, etc.	\$6,000		X	X	Parks Program/Education Program
Provide educational opportunities at the Hermit Cabin and Line Shack.	N/A			On-going	Parks Program/Education Program
Education of hunting and non-hunting publics to minimize user conflicts.	N/A			On-going	Education Program
Work with other agencies and local organizations to coordinate educational and interpretive programs.	N/A			On-going	Education Program
Incorporate Hermit Park Open Space into the Departmental Volunteer Naturalist Program.	N/A			On-going	Volunteer Program
Note that while various programs may be responsible for a particular task, the implementation of the task may involve cross-program cooperation and participation as well as the use of volunteers.					

5. APPENDIX A: Species Lists

6. APPENDIX B: Deed of Conservation Easement

7. APPENDIX C: Management Zone Descriptions

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Colorado Climate Center. 2001. Website: www.wrcc.dri.edu
2. Cooper, D. and D. Merritt. 1996. *Larimer County Partnership and Land Use System: Proposed Wetland Classification and Protection Program*. M.S. Ecological Consultants, Fort Collins, CO.
3. Doyle, G. 2004. *Survey of Critical Biological Resources Larimer County , Colorado 2004*. Colorado Natural Heritage Program.
4. Environmental Resources Management. 2006. *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment*. Greenwood Village, CO.