



Photo Zach Schierl

2022

Larimer County Natural Resources

QUARTERLY BOARD REPORT 3RD QUARTER (JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER)



A future open space conserved forever.



Sweeping landscape views are now protected into perpetuity at Heaven's Door Ranch.
Photo credit Larimer County

Larimer County is under contract to purchase and conserve, as a future open space, the 1,547-acre Heaven's Door Ranch. Located at the mouth of the Big Thompson Canyon and along Hwy. 34, the property is highly visible and of regional significance to the county and municipal partners. The ranch provides a significant buffer to other conserved lands, protects the hogbacks and foothills backdrop, possesses diverse wildlife habitat, and offers future public access opportunities. Following closing on the purchase in late 2022, staff will conduct resource inventories, initiate restoration activities, and assess funding and timing to open to future public use.

Small Grants Program celebrates 25 years of community impact

In 1998, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources launched the Small Grants Program to support community-led projects in the county with a portion of the Help Preserve Open Spaces 1/4-cent sales tax funds. To date, over 220 community and neighborhood projects have been funded county-wide. To celebrate and recognize the exemplary projects awarded over the life of the program, a commemorative website was developed and an increase of award funds to \$25,000 will be distributed in 2023. The grantees will be announced in March. To visit the commemorative website, visit larimer.gov/small-grants.



Small grants recipient, Stockwell Elementary, showcases the results of their grant award.
Photo credit Stockwell Elementary

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TXT TEXT MESSAGE: Send keyword **lcboating** or **lcopenspaces** to: **(833) 581-0014**

EMAIL: Head to larimer.org/naturalresources/subscribe and submit your email or phone number.

Notification system launched to improve visitor communication

Recent increases (20-30%) in visitation at Larimer County parks and open spaces over the last two years spurred the use of technology to better inform visitors of parking availability before they arrive. This July, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources launched an opt-in, subscription-based free notification service via either text or email, to alert subscribers when specific parking lots have nearly reached capacity. In its first season, 956 subscribers took advantage of this new communications tool. To subscribe, visit larimer.gov/naturalresources/subscribe.

Buildings removed to make way for wider views and healthier habitats

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources completed a significant step this quarter towards improving the viewshed and habitat at Red Mountain Open Space. Several dilapidated buildings visible from the Red Mountain Open Space entry road were removed and the sites regraded for reseeding to native vegetation. Earlier habitat enhancement projects in the immediate vicinity included fencing cattle out of a spring-fed riparian area and restoring several two-track roads. These efforts, combined with plans to remove an earthen dam, restore wetlands, and remove some additional roads, will help meet the Department's goals to improve the view and maintain healthy, sustainable wildlife habitat at a most valued open space.



Before demolition (top photo) and after demolition, revealing the view and native vegetation (bottom photo). Photo credit Amy Gilboy

Employing cattle to improve habitat



Degraded habitat at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space (top photo), and after recovery (bottom photo). Photo credit Casey Cisneros

Larimer County Natural Resource Department (LCDNR) aims to enhance native plant and wildlife habitats by integrating sustainable cattle grazing onto open space ecosystems that evolved with similar disturbances from bison. In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, LCDNR implements adaptive grazing management on many open space properties. Recent site evaluations of newly acquired parcels at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space revealed that some grasslands and riparian habitats were degraded from cattle disproportionately spending time grazing in these areas. To allow these native communities to recover, staff fenced the cattle out of sensitive areas and varied grazing rotations to decrease selection pressure on specific plant species and increase soil organic matter. In a single growing season, the native plant communities rebounded. Ongoing monitoring of grazing practices on county open spaces ensures that cattle grazing continues to contribute to improving ecosystem health.

Volunteer Ranger Assistants on the water

Encouraging water safety is more important than ever with increased paddle craft recreation in Larimer County along with record drownings being documented in Colorado. Volunteer Ranger Assistants (VRAs) serve as a visible presence at Larimer County parks and open spaces connecting visitors to safety and stewardship information, site monitoring, and general assistance. This summer, eight VRAs piloted a new type of patrol - by paddle craft - on the water. Focusing their efforts at Horsetooth Reservoir Satanka Bay, the Paddler VRAs educated visitors on the importance of life jackets, whistles, and tips for safe water recreation. Meeting paddlers where they are made a notable difference in reaching visitors in a new way and sharing best practices for personal safety, responsible recreation and stewardship.



Paddle VRAs take it to the water to bolster water recreation safety. Photo credit Carla Lucas

It's a bird, no – it's a plane!



The small plane visible over the reservoir just prior to its crash in the nearby open space. Photo credit Stephanie Stamos – Associated Press

On September 11, a small single engine plane crashed in Horsetooth Mountain Open Space near Loggers and Sawmill trails. The plane had been witnessed and reported by visitors to be flying erratically over Horsetooth Reservoir and was unable to gain adequate elevation. The downed aircraft was successfully salvaged from the open space and minimal damage to vegetation or trail was reported. Larimer County's Sheriff's Office, National Transportation Safety Board, and the Federal Aviation Administration are investigating the crash.

National Public Lands Day caps successful season of stewardship work

An engaged group of volunteers joined Natural Resources Department staff on National Public Lands Day, September 24th to help maintain parks and open spaces in Larimer County. Volunteers worked together to remove 690 feet of barbed wire fence from Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, resulting not only in a more wildlife friendly environment but also salvaging 320 pounds of recyclable material. In addition, nearly one mile of trail was maintained at Horsetooth Reservoir near the popular Rotary Day Use Area, which included clearing the trail corridor, closing social trails, and building rock steps. And finally, nineteen bags of litter were removed from Carter Lake and Pinewood reservoirs during a group litter cleanup effort.



Volunteers get a quick tutorial on fence removal from staff before they safely begin their work. Photo credit Jim Janicki

Financial Summary

Larimer County Natural Resources Department has five primary revenue sources including Colorado Lottery proceeds, the Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales Tax, user fees on open spaces, user fees on

reservoir parks, and the weed district property tax. Below are the year-to-date revenue summaries and operating expenses as compared to the same period the previous year.

Open Spaces

	2021	2022	
Revenue			
Intergovernment Revenue	\$491,194	\$587,041	
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$1,602	\$121,330	
Service Charges Revenue	\$153,716	\$148,809	
Specific Designated Taxes	\$5,947,854	\$6,814,264	
User Fees Revenue	\$1,335,562	\$1,196,948	
Total	\$7,929,928	\$8,868,392	12%
Expense			
Personnel Expenses	\$1,159,475	\$1,200,863	
Operating Expenses	\$2,255,126	\$2,693,119	
Total	\$3,414,601	\$3,893,981	14%
Capital Expenses	\$29,047	\$1,304,467	

Reservoir Parks

	2021	2022	
Revenue			
General Fund	\$146,746	\$141,534	
Intergovernment Revenue	\$120,643	\$123,763	
Miscellaneous Revenue	\$61,175	\$2,250	
Service Charges Revenue	\$269,449	\$230,575	
User Fees Revenue	\$4,313,849	\$4,907,136	
Total	\$4,911,862	\$5,405,258	10%
Expense			
Personnel Expenses	\$2,844,939	\$3,513,988	
Operating Expenses	\$1,505,468	\$1,374,301	
Total	\$4,350,407	\$4,888,289	12%
Capital Expenses	\$2,072,620	\$136,761	

County Weed District & Enterprise

	2021	2022	
Revenue			
General Fund	\$77,157	\$79,848	
Intergovernment Revenue	-	-	
Service Charges Revenue	\$323,736	\$306,008	
Specific Designated Taxes	\$811,634	\$846,917	
Total	\$1,212,527	\$1,232,773	2%
Expense			
Personnel Expenses	\$397,952	\$500,357	
Operating Expenses	\$409,032	\$471,593	
Total	\$806,985	\$971,950	20%

Conservation Trust - Lottery

	2021	2022	
Revenue			
Conservation Trust/Lottery	\$594,145	\$611,838	3%



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