

Open Lands Property Evaluation

Property Name: Bernard II Conservation Easement

PROJECT IS BEING EVALUATED FOR THE FOLLOWING SHADED VALUES:

Scenic	Significant Plants/Natural Communities	Geological
Buffer	Outdoor Recreational	Paleontological
Wildlife Habitat	Historical/Archaeological	Educational
Wetlands	Agricultural	Other (explain)

EVALUATION CRITERIA

These criteria establish evaluation strategies that can be applied to properties proposed for acquisition under the Open Lands Program. These criteria are guidelines and will be used as a tool in determining properties that may be suitable and appropriate for acquisition.

This scoring system is an index, not a precise measurement, and is used as a guideline for setting priorities and making recommendations.

High (H), Medium (M), Low (L), Not Rated (NR)

I. Context

Rating:

HIGH

1. To what extent is the property located adjacent to or near other protected lands or open space?
 - Located within the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project Area, this conservation easement is also adjacent to Red Mountain Open Space, Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and other conservation easement lands (including the Bernard I CE).
2. Is there potential that surrounding property may be protected with this property's protection?
 - See above.
3. Does this property add to a more sustainable whole?
 - See above.
4. Is protecting this property a strategic move to protect a larger area?
 - Yes, it is part of the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project which will protect over 55,000 acres.
5. What is the potential that the property will be developed or changed in land use?
 - The property is already protected in fee by Fort Collins, however due to their use of GOCO funds, they need to donate a CE to another entity.
6. How compatible are the adjacent land uses with this proposed protection and use of this property?
 - Adjacent land uses are primarily ranching and open space, both of which match the proposed use of this property.

II. Environment/Ecology

Rating:

HIGH

1. How important are the wildlife habitat qualities and plant communities?

- The property is in good condition and consists of intact shortgrass prairie providing habitat to the suite of grassland birds of conservation, coyote, fox, pronghorn and other species.
2. To what extent does the property provide a buffer to minimize the disruption of ecological processes on already protected land?
 - This property is adjacent to already protected open space and conservation easement lands and provides additional uninterrupted wildlife movement corridors, intact vegetation communities and scenic quality.
 3. To what extent are there important and/or sustainable wetland or riparian areas (note also water rights availability)?
 - Rawhide Creek flows ephemeral through the property.
 4. How manageable are any exotic plant/animal species on the property?
 - There are few to no non-native species on the property.
 5. If applicable, what is the potential for habitat restoration?
 - Not applicable.

III. Scenic/Aesthetic/Sense of Place

Rating:

HIGH

1. Does the property provide vistas or important scenic backdrop?
 - The views of and from the property are of intact, uninterrupted shortgrass prairie consisting of rolling hills, flatlands and bisecting arroyos.
2. What is the property's visual exposure from roads, trails or other prominent locations?
 - The property is highly visible from CR15 as well as the trail system on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.
3. Does this property serve as a community buffer or separator?
 - No

IV. Outdoor Recreation/Public Use

Rating:

HIGH

1. What is the potential for public use on this property?
 - There is potential for his property to have public use on it; more importantly, it is a critical property for protecting the views from the recreation system on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.
2. To what extent does this property provide opportunity to integrate public use into a larger recreation network?
 - If public access is developed, it would connect into the over 35 miles of trails on Soapstone Prairie Natural Area which also connect to ~14 miles of trails on Red Mountain Open Space.
3. What opportunities for outdoor recreation does this property provide?
 - The conservation easement allows for non-motorized trail and nature based recreation.

V. Historical/Archaeological

Rating:

HIGH

1. Does the property contain significant archaeological or historic resources based upon State Historic Preservation Office criteria or National Register of Historic Places standards?
 - N/A
2. Does the property contain other significant archaeological or historic resources of concern to local research institutions, professionals, interest groups or other agencies?
 - A formal archaeological survey has not been completed, however extensive archaeological surveys of the surrounding area would indicated a high probability of significant artifacts and significance on this site.

VI. Agricultural

Rating:

LOW

1. Is agricultural use of the land suitable and sustainable within the context of surrounding land use?
 - Yes, for ranching.
2. Does the property help maintain a sense of agricultural tradition and rural character?
 - Yes
3. Is operation and management (lease, leaseback, etc.) of the property for continued agricultural use by the County economically acceptable/feasible?
 - The city will likely continue to graze the property with a lessee.
4. What crops are grown?
 - cattle
5. What is the irrigation status and associated water rights?
 - N/A

VII. Geological/Paleontological

Rating:

N/A

- This property is not being evaluated for it's geologic value

VIII. Environmental Education

Rating:

MEDIUM

1. Are there environmental, historical and/or cultural education opportunities?
 - The conservation easement allows for educational signs/observation shelters/kiosks to be placed on the property if it is developed for public access.

IX. Political Factors

Rating:

MEDIUM

1. Is this a high profile acquisition from the public perspective?
 - The Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project is highly known and popular from a public perspective. This project is significant in reaching the 55,000 acre protected goal of the Project.
2. Will acquisition of this property serve as a catalyst for other acquisitions?
 - Unknown
2. Will acquisition of this property in the manner proposed serve as a positive example for other landowners?

- The property was protected by the City of Fort Collins in fee with a willing landowner. There is one reserved homesite that will allow the City to find a conservation buyer if desired.
3. Does the project contribute to the Open Lands Program balance based on:
 [-Geographic distribution? - Project type? - Urgent/immediate demands and long term/farsighted goals? - Population distribution?]
- Yes, this project, being a conservation easement in the Laramie Foothills at no cost to the County represents a balance in location, type and meets a long-term goal in a low population area to protect a significant intact ecological landscape.

X. Price

Rating:

HIGH = Good

1. Is the price reasonable given current supply and demand and net present value?
 - The CE is a full donation to the county at no cost.
2. Is the landowner willing to reduce the cost to the county for charitable or tax purposes?
 - N/A
3. Is cost sharing with partners significant?
 - Fort Collins and GOCO were partners in the cost to protect the property; Larimer County will be a partner in holding and monitoring the CE.
4. Can the goals of the Open Lands Program be achieved with less than fee acquisition?
 - Yes, and they are via a CE.
5. Will the property become more expensive or unavailable if not acquired now?
 - The City will likely find another entity to hold the CE, however Larimer County holds 4 other CE's in this vicinity for the City, plus numerous other CE's with private landowners and the City holds the CE on Red Mountain Open Space – so the relationship is in place and good.
6. Are the projected annual management and maintenance costs acceptable and reasonable?
 - CE monitoring is already accounted for in the long-term management spreadsheet for the Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales Tax fund.

Scoring System

The scoring system is used by Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department staff with input from appropriate professionals and/or experts to evaluate various properties against the evaluation criteria so that the Open Lands Advisory Board can make reasoned decisions for recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The scoring system is an index, not a precise measurement, and is used as a guideline for setting priorities and making recommendations.

The process shall consist of an index of a high, medium, or low ranking for each of the criteria applicable to the property in question. There may be situations on some properties where a particular evaluation criterion is not applicable and therefore not ranked.

Adopted by the Open Lands Advisory Board, August 22, 2000
 Adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, August 28, 2000