

Open-space panel discussion focuses on obstacles to a coordinated effort

Community officials talk about protecting open areas between growing communities

By CARA O'BRIEN
Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Between the cities of Loveland and Fort Collins lies a swath of grassy open land, with clear views to the foothills and mountains.

"It's really kind of nice," says John Stokes, Fort Collins's director of natural resources. "I like that feeling of openness between the two communities."

And as the Northern Colorado region grows and the original spaces between the communities dwindle under the pressures of development, some people are looking to reignite the discussion around creating open spaces between communities.

The League of Women Voters for Larimer County held a panel discussion Monday evening at Harmony Library in Fort Collins on the issues that surround community separators and the preservation of open space buffers.

Everyone on the panel, which included representatives from most



Loveland Mayor Gene Plein: "What we need to try to do is work together and come up with a solution that works."



Berthoud Trustee Jeff Hindman: "The jury's out on how things are going to happen."

Northern Colorado communities agreed that type of project must involve major collaboration among the communities, and it's difficult without funding sources.

"What we need to try to do is work together and come up with a solution that works," said Loveland Mayor Gene Plein.

And while a joint effort between Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County made the open land between Loveland and Fort Collins happen, the community leaders at Monday's panel all talked about the

numerous barriers to that kind of project.

It comes down to, "you take what you can get," said Jeff Hindman, trustee for the town of Berthoud.

"We're finding it very difficult to establish a plan identifying specific land," said Troy Mellon, former mayor of Johnstown.

All the leaders said it often is difficult to find the landowners willing to participate in a buffer, and, even then, few communities have the funding to purchase land outright.

Larimer County has a tax that contributes to open space, the revenue from which is distributed among the various communities. Fort Collins has a similar funding source.

But for other communities, the pressure to develop retail that will keep the city's coffers full can be too much.

"We would love to keep (the Interstate 25 corridor) open," Plein said. "It may or may not be able to happen."

At the end of the night, the audience urged the people on the panel to continue to work on this issue, and to make it a priority.

"The jury's out on how things are going to happen," Hindman said.

The Coloradan, Sunday, November 30, 2008, E3

Get your outdoors lover the perfect holiday present

Will Talbott

Open spaces

On a recent trip to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space overlooking Horsetooth Reservoir and the city of Fort Collins, I was captivated by the majestic wilderness right in our backyard.

It is not uncommon to go on a day hike at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, or any other Larimer County Department of Natural Resources venue, and feel completely alone with nature. With the holiday season approaching, I naturally thought about how I can give this experience to those special people this year?

An annual vehicle permit for entrance to the Larimer County parks and open spaces is a perfect holiday gift. Annual permits are \$65 for Larimer County residents and \$85 for non-residents. These calendar-based permits allow the use of Horsetooth Reservoir, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir, Ramsay-Shoockey Open

Space and Hermit Park Open Space.

Do you have a boat owner on your holiday list? How about giving them an annual boat permit for access to Horsetooth Reservoir, Carter Lake and Pinewood Reservoir?

Annual boat permits are also \$65 for Larimer County residents and \$85 for nonresidents. For non-motorized, nonregistered boats (canoes, kayaks, rafts, racing shells, sailboards), Natural Resources offers a paddling permit for \$35.

This family permit is valid for up to three vessels from the same household on the water at a time. Annual permits for 2009 will be available on Monday. They are valid immediately upon purchase. Pick them up at the Bison Visitor Center near Flatiron Reservoir southwest of Loveland, the Citizen Information Center in the

Fort Collins courthouse offices at 200 W. Oak St., from rangers in the parks and open spaces or online at www.larimer.org/parks/permits.htm. Retail locations in Fort Collins, Loveland and Berthoud will carry the permits beginning next spring.

Or how about purchasing a night or weekend for that special person at one of our beautiful camper cabins? These popular getaway destinations are located at Horsetooth Reservoir, Flatiron Reservoir and Hermit Park Open Space.

Nightly fees for camper cabins are \$30 per night at Horsetooth and Flatiron Reservoirs and \$60 per night at Hermit Park Open Space during October through March. April through September fees for camper cabins are \$60 per night at Horsetooth and Flatiron Reservoirs and \$90 to \$100 at Hermit Park Open Space.

Will Talbott is a Larimer County Natural Resources Horsetooth district ranger. Send an e-mail to him at waltbott@larimer.org

BEST OF THE BLOGS

New rules

at county parks

> The new year is likely to bring a few new rules to Larimer County's parks system.

The proposed rules, which are expected to be formally approved by the county commissioners next week, include provisions aimed at taming animals.

One would require campers to store food, toiletries and trash in a hard-sided vehicle or container so as to not attract animals. Another

Editor's note

Following are excerpts from some of the blogs produced by readers and Coloradoan staffers.

Readers are invited to visit coloradoan.com to read the full blog entries and write their own blogs.

would prohibit the intentional feeding of wildlife, including birds.

Safety concerns for humans and animals alike are behind the rules, said Gary Buffington, director of the county's Natural Resources Department.

The new regulations were inspired in part by the county's experience running

Hermit Park Open Space near Estes Park, Buffington told the county commissioners this week.

The park has quite a few "active" black bears, he said, that will raid coolers and picnic baskets, ala Yogi Berra if given a chance.

—Region Report blog
(Coloradoan reporter Kevin Duggan)

The Coloradoan, Sunday, January 4, 2009

JAN. 15

BIRDING

Eagle Watch

4:30 p.m., Fossil Creek Reservoir
Regional Open Space, Highway 392
(Carpenter Road) just west of I-25.
Information: www.larimer.org/natural-resources

JAN. 22

BIRDING

Eagle Watch

4:30 p.m., Fossil Creek Reservoir
Regional Open Space, Highway 392
(Carpenter Road) just west of I-25.
Information: www.larimer.org/naturalresources

JAN. 29

BIRDING

Eagle Watch

4:30 p.m., Fossil Creek Reservoir
Regional Open Space, Highway 392
(Carpenter Road) just west of I-25.
Information: www.larimer.org/naturalresources

Thankful for outdoor recreation

COLORADO

11-23-2008

Mark Caughlan

Open spaces

Like most people I know, I'm afraid to even look at my 401(K), let alone think about my next vacation.

My dream of retiring early will remain a dream, at least for the foreseeable future. I think we are all feeling the pinch of the latest financial crisis.

Planning a dream vacation may need to wait awhile. Thankfully, Larimer County Natural Resources provides diverse, inexpensive outdoor vacations right in our own backyard.

For a quiet year-round getaway, Hermit Park Open Space, just outside of Rocky Mountain National Park, offers cozy little camper cabins and campsites. Opportunities abound

around Hermit Park. You can sit by a warm campfire

under the stars, take a hike to Krigger Rock or one of the many trails in Rocky Mountain National Park,

fish great local waters, watch the elk bogle among amazing fall colors, try world-class rock climbing, or stroll the many shops and activities in Estes Park.

Planning a wedding, family reunion or other special event in the coming year? Hermit Park offers a beautiful site to host your event.

Want to get out on a quick hike or mountain bike ride? Head over to Horsetooth Mountain, Devil's Backbone, or Blue Sky Trail open spaces.

Combined, they offer more than 30 miles of trails to explore. Take a moderate hike to Horsetooth Rock and experience the amazing 360-degree views. A more leisurely trail for the whole family but one that is nonetheless rewarding is to Horsetooth Falls. Both trails are part of the Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Is horseback riding more your style? Try Eagles Nest Open Space and ride along the North Fork of the Poudre River.

Looking for someplace new and different? The 13,500-acre Red Mountain

Open Space will open in summer of 2009. Come out and enjoy some of the best mountain biking, hiking and horseback riding Colorado has to offer.

Looking for water-related activities? Spend a hot summer day on the cool waters of our scenic reservoirs. Enjoy hanging out with friends on your boat or casting your line into some of the best fishing waters in the West.

Horsetooth Reservoir also offers inexpensive camping right along the shoreline. Just pull your boat up to your campsite. Camping is offered year-round at Horsetooth, Carter Lake, Pinewood and Flatiron reservoirs. You can even rent a camper cabin along the shores of Horsetooth or Flatiron.

Your next vacation doesn't need to be to some far-off, exotic destination. Now is a great time to start planning a vacation to your local parks and open spaces. You might even be able to save a little money for that early retirement.

For more information about Larimer County Natural Resources, go to www.larimer.org/naturaresources, or for camping reservations www.larimer-camping.com

Mark Caughlan is the Horsetooth District Manager for Larimer County Natural Resources. Call him at 499-5606 or send e-mail to mcaughlan@larimer.org

With a little extra attention, you won't miss a moment

COLORADO

11-16-2008

Debra Wykoff

Open spaces

Sometimes, the biggest moments in life are the smallest. Often, these moments catch us by surprise.

We can only hope to be paying attention and not let one slip by. Such a moment happened in September at the 2008 Northern Colorado Birding Fair at Fossil Creek Regional Open Space.

We took our grandsons to the birding fair last year, too. Both boys, then ages 4 and 11, were entertained by activities at the fair for more than three hours. A preschooler with energy to burn and a pre-teen with a keen intellect found lots to learn and plenty of room to run. The release of a great horned owl made such an impression on them that they were still talking about it a year later.

At this year's birding fair, nature writer Kevin J. Cook talked about life-changing birds he has encountered. He told the story of his quest to see an albatross, like that recounted in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". After

years of waiting, Kevin

finally saw one only to realize that it had no particular significance to him. His "albatross" was a bird of a different feather, which had touched him in a way that changed his life.

Our 12-year-old grandson, Devin, found this story intriguing. When the talk was over, Devin turned to me and said, "What's your albatross? Mine is the barn owl."

I asked him if he would like to talk to the author about it. Devin shrugged and said maybe, sorta, he didn't know. Other people had cornered Kevin first. After a long wait, we began to walk away.

But then I looked at this boy, the fire for knowledge burning bright in his eyes. I knew this was one of those moments, which I could not let pass. It was important — maybe even life-changing — for Devin, the young learner, to talk to Kevin, the wise expert. To share that new insight,

to connect with the "guide" who gave it to him, to realize that his voice counts and will be heard with respect.

Kevin was picking up his materials to depart. But he set them down again and gave Devin his full and undivided attention. When Kevin learned that Devin had not yet seen his bird, except in photos, he thought a moment, and then began coaching Devin on where, when and how to find a barn owl in Larimer County.

Perhaps, Kevin also understood the significance of this moment. He took the time to listen and encourage a budding birder. He was paying attention to the truly important, and he did not let it slip by. And someday soon, Devin and I will go looking for barn owls, under bridges out on the back roads, way up in the north part of the county.

Debra Wykoff is the administrative services manager at Larimer County Natural Resources. Call her at 679-4567 or send e-mail to wykoffd@co.larimer.co.us

Leafy spurge — A perennial problem

Tim D'Amato

Open spaces

Remember those familiar words from "The Night Before Christmas?"

"As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly, as they meet with an obstacle mount to the sky, so up to the rooftops his couriers they flew, with a sleigh full of toys and leafy spurge, too!"

It's true. Besides toys for good little girls and boys, Santa's reindeer may transport something else: Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) — the worst noxious weed problem in Larimer County. Weed seed moves in many ways — wind, water, vehicles, bird droppings, in the fur and manure of livestock and wildlife, and in hay grown in infested pastures. So you see how those reindeer come into it.

This perennial invader has consumed many acres along the Poudre River from the middle Poudre Canyon to the Weld County line and beyond. Found along the North Fork of the Poudre from Livermore to Seaman Reservoir, it is widespread from Bellvue through Rust Canyon, and on a multitude of pastures in and around Laporte and north of Fort Collins.

Leafy spurge was first reported in Larimer County in a pasture near Laporte in the 1960s. Not considered a problem, it was not controlled and has spread to thousands of surrounding acres. Easily identified by the milky latex found when breaking a stem or leaf, the plant displays bright yellow bracts and flowers from April through June.

Native to Europe and western Asia, leafy spurge entered the western U.S. as a seed contaminant in the late 1800s. This noxious weed now infests more than 5 million acres in North America, drastically reducing rangeland productivity, native plant diversity, wildlife habitat and land values.

Leafy spurge is on the state and Larimer County noxious weed lists, meaning residents are obligated to control this invasive species. Larimer County requires mowing to prevent seed dispersal. Other control measures include sheep or goat grazing, insect bio-control and herbicide application. The best way to suppress leafy spurge is to properly manage range or pasture. Excessive grazing reduces grasses and opens the door for weed invasion.

How do we get a handle on the problem? Education is a good start. Leafy spurge reproduces by spreading roots, and seeds spread by animals and floating along irrigation ditches and rivers. When we understand that our weed problem becomes our neighbor's weed problem and threatens our natural areas, we will be more likely to take responsibility for managing our weeds.

With cooperation among landowners, public land managers, ditch companies — and even Santa Claus — we can start to control leafy spurge in Larimer County. For information on noxious weed identification and management, site visits, educational presentations, and enforcement procedures, contact the Larimer County Weed District at 498-5768.

Tim D'Amato is the land stewardship manager for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. Contact him at 498-5768 or send e-mail to tdamato@larimer.org

Over the river, through the woods:
COLORADAN 12-8-2008

What goes into the making of a trail

Megan Fleniken

Open spaces

Over the river and through the woods on open space trails we go.

The horse knows the way and so do the hikers and bikers because the trails lead them to scenic vistas and points of interest along a route that was carefully designed for an enjoyable experience.

Have you ever wondered what goes into building a trail?

When Larimer County acquires a new open space, a resource management plan is developed with public involvement. The plan identifies areas with sensitive natural and cultural resources to protect as well as areas that hold important educational, scenic or experience values for visitors. These areas are set as control points on the property and are used to design trail routes that lead visitors to these experiences while protecting sensitive habitat areas.

Joel Wykoff, trails and open lands projects supervisor, and the trail crew work with me to design Larimer County's trails. He says, "A good trail leads people to the desired viewpoints. It is the best place to be in order to see what we want to see!"

A good trail also protects natural and cultural resources and is sustainable. A sustainable trail can shed water during moisture events and handle the types of uses that will be allowed on the trail. Specific trail standards are applied to ensure that a sustainable trail is constructed to lead to each control point.

The topography of a site is one primary factor considered during the trail design. For example, Joel explains that a hiking-only trail can generally be designed and built with slightly steeper grades and narrower steps than one that also allows horses. Equestrian trails require spacing of steps to include landings wide enough for a horse to get its rear feet back under it as the rider descends.

Trail designs also take into account harmony with the landscape. As Joel notes, nature doesn't go in straight lines. We ensure that the trail blends into the environment. Avoiding unnecessary structures like steps, bridges and signs, as much as possible, is one way of maintaining a natural experience.

Spending the time and effort on trail design and layout is a good investment in the final trail building product. Well-designed and well-built trails provide high-quality visitor experiences but require less maintenance over time. Individual and group volunteers assist our trails crew in maintaining trails every year through our adopt-a-trail program.

That stretches your open space tax dollars further. The next time you are hiking, biking or horseback riding on your favorite open space trail, know that your route through the woods or skirting around the meadow was carefully designed so that you can relax and enjoy a wonderful experience.

Megan Fleniken is the open lands resource specialist for Larimer County Natural Resources. Call her at 679-4562 or send e-mail to mfleniken@larimer.org

Grant awarded to Red Mountain, Soapstone trails

North Forty News — November 2008 — 19

Two open space projects in Larimer County have received \$550,000 in Lottery funds from a competitive grant awarded by the Great Outdoors Colorado Board.

Larimer County and Fort Collins will use the money for part of the \$1.3 million Laramie Foothills Trails Development Project, which is building 42 miles of trails and three trailheads at Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. Combined, the trails will provide access to 27,000 acres of open space not open to the public previously.

"This was one of our highest ranking projects this grant cycle," said GOOCO Board vice

chair and former senator Peggy Reeves, a Fort Collins resident. "Larimer County has experienced tremendous growth in recent years and this means that many of our trails and outdoor recreation areas are overcrowded. Development of the Laramie Foothills Trails will fill a crucial need and provide a truly exceptional outdoor experience."

Red Mountain Open Space and the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area were purchased in 2004 as part of the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project, a joint effort of Larimer County, Fort Collins, The Nature Conservancy and the Legacy Land Trust to create a mountains-to-

plains conservation zone totaling roughly 140,000 acres over 22 miles in the Laramie Foothills and surrounding areas.

In addition to new trails and access to open space for hikers, bikers and equestrians, the Red Mountain and Soapstone areas boast diverse geology that includes rock buttes and formations, grassland vistas, red rock walls, stone circles, and bison jumps and wallows. Additionally, Soapstone provides access to the Lindenmeier Archaeological Site, which was declared a national historic landmark in 1961. Because of the area's rich historic and geologic resources, the city and county secured grants from the State Historic Fund and have studied and inventoried the sites extensively since purchasing them in 2004.

The joint county-city grant application, which earned top ranking, was one of 25 requests adding up to \$10 million. GOOCO was able to award \$3.5 million



Getting ready for many feet. K-Lynn Cameron, open lands program manager, and Joel Wykoff, trail crew supervisor, lay out one of the trails at the county's Red Mountain Open Space. The Red Mountain and Soapstone areas are scheduled to open to the public on June 6.

Photo by Meegan Flenniken

to seven projects. Great Outdoors Colorado is the result of a citizens' initiative passed by Colorado voters in 1992. GOOCO receives about \$53 million annually from Lottery proceeds and directs those funds to projects that protect and enhance Colorado's parks, wildlife, trails, rivers and open space. Since 1994, projects in Larimer County have been awarded more than \$30.7 million in GOOCO grants.

It's time to take advantage of winter out of the ordinary

It is said that the winter months are a time for reflection and introspection. Introspection is like going into a deep, dark cave; you never know what creepy things you might find in there.

Might I suggest the more mentally and physically healthy pursuit of getting out to the Larimer County parks and open spaces. That may require dragging yourself away from the basement dungeon, winter projects or lying around in your jammies watching the shopping network. But there

Charles Gindler

Open spaces

are some amazing rewards.

Colorado winter comes in a number of flavors, and the Larimer County Natural Resources Department can suggest a great outing to match each flavor.

There are those cold, icy mornings with a bit of fog hanging in the low places. Bundle up and take a stroll along the paths at Fossil Creek Reservoir on

the southeast side of Fort Collins. You'll see an incredible number of bird species, like waterfowl in the open patches of water, maybe a bald eagle sitting on the ice eating a fish and a variety of raptors roosting in the skeletal cottonwoods around the shore.

Or take a hike through the Devil's Backbone Open Space with the crazy vertebrate catching the first morning rays. The light on such mornings can yield extraordinary photos.

There are those mid-winter, breezy days of bright sun and 60-plus

degree temperatures when the snow has been swept away for a few days. Don't dither, get yourself (or yourself and a horse) up to Eagle's Nest Open Space by Livermore. Or put on your boots or get on your bike and head to the Blue Sky Trail south of Horsetooth Reservoir.

The first thing you'll notice is a lot less people than last summer. The second thing is these places don't look the same. The colors have changed and there is the luminescence of the low winter sun. That warm sun on your face is a tonic.

has been actively managing it with an integrated approach since 2004. Yellow starthistle is an annual in the sunflower family. In June and after every rainstorm, the plants emerge into a rosette with deeply lobed leaves. The plants produce branched stems about 2 feet tall that are winged and covered with cottony hairs. It has a disklike flower that is bright yellow, with 1 to 2 inches of straw-colored spines below, creating a starlike appearance on the end of short branches.

Under dry conditions, it will grow a couple inches tall with a solitary flower. Within weeks, the plant is producing seed. After the seeds have been dispersed, cotton tufts remain over winter.

During the growing season, crews wielding show-els scout the infested 5 acres west of Berthoud, removing plants and bagging them if a flower is present. If an area has higher concentrations, then crews spot spray the plants with herbicides. To prevent yellow starthistle

Maybe the best are those days when huge snow flakes float down relentlessly in the still air or the clouds droop to the tree tops at Horsetooth Mountain Park west of Fort Collins, or Ramsay-Shockey Open Space above Pinewood Reservoir or Hermit Park just south of Estes. It's the stillness that's remarkable. You are encapsulated in this shroud of white with dark forms of the trees just visible beside the trail.

That's enchantment as you are transported to somewhere way out of your ordinary day. Like you, the deer, elk, coyotes, bobcats and maybe a mountain lion are joyfully ranging about in this winter reprieve.

It is winter and we are pretty far north of Cancun. So the days are short and you need to take advantage of the weekends. Go see these places in a totally different mood and context.

Charles Gindler is the Larimer Foothills park manager for Larimer County Natural Resources. Contact him at 498-5606 or send an e-mail to cgindler@larimer.org.

Dangerous yellow starthistle infesting area near Berthoud

The Coloradan, Sunday, January 4, 2009.

Maxine Guill

Open spaces

West of Berthoud grows a plant with sharp spine and winged stems that will make a horse sick because of chewing disease and Californians cry with 20 million acres infested with the weed in the state.

Brought to California with alfalfa seed from Chile in the 1850s, yellow starthistle has spread to 40 of the 48 contiguous states. In Colorado, it's found in seven counties. Heavy equipment or hay transported it west of Berthoud where it now

infests about 5 acres. Yellow starthistle is potentially Colorado's worst weed. Though less than 100 acres in the state are currently infested, this invasive species could rapidly spread to rangeland and natural areas if aggressive steps are not taken. One only has to see the thousands of acres of solid yellow starthistle infestation in the Hell's Canyon area on the

Idaho/Oregon border to see how invasive this plant is in areas with climatic conditions similar to Colorado. Recognizing this major threat to the environment and economy of Colorado, the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Act categorized yellow starthistle as a List "A" species in 2003. The designation requires eradication of the species. Larimer County Weed District, in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Agriculture and effected landowners,

from spreading, landowners need to be educated on proper identification and manage rangelands and pastures to be vigorous and competitive against invasive plants. For more information on yellow starthistle or any noxious weed, management, site visits or educational presentations, call the weed district at 498-5768 or visit www.larimer.org/weeds/

Maxine Guill is a weed specialist with the Larimer County Natural Resources Department. Call her at 498-5768.

COLORADOAN 12-14-08

www.coloradoan.com

Trippin'

Enjoy some solitude at Ramsay-Shockey

BY MILES BLUMHARDT

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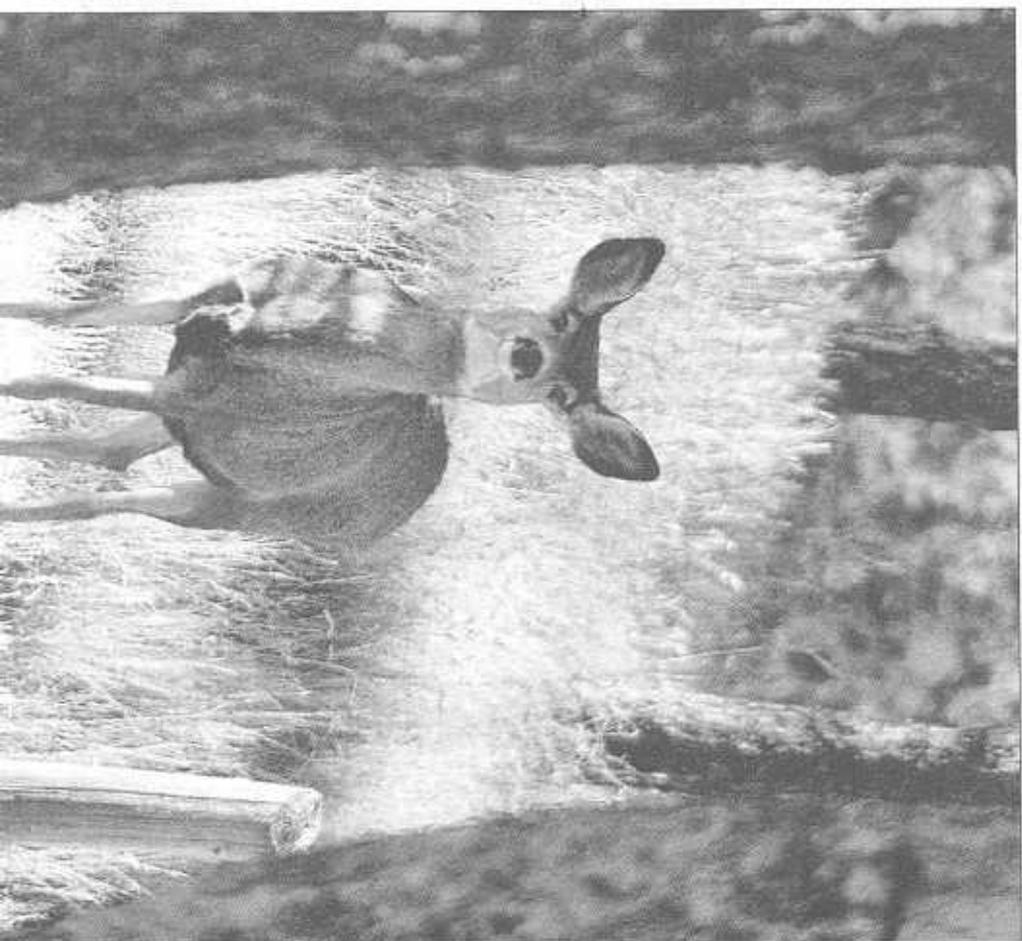
When choosing where to go for my outdoor trips, the two most important factors are timing and solitude.

Going at different times of the year presents a different look at areas that I commonly visit. Plus, there are prime times to visit locations and other times when the areas offer little more than being outdoors.

And it's not that I don't like people. I do at family gatherings, work and Christmas parties. But when I'm outdoors, others distract me from what I cherish most in the outdoors — solitude.

By myself I can fully absorb the experience. There is no conversation, no hurrying, no waiting for someone. I think, absorb, stop when I want to listen or to make an image and move at a pace that I wish.

Often, to find solitude it means going at off-peak times of the year. But at some places, off-peak to most recreationists can mean prime time for oth-



The 177-acre Ramsay-Shockey Open Space west of Loveland in late fall is one of those places and one of those times where prime time and solitude meet. During summer, the camping and fishing crowds amass here for good reason.

The 325-acre Pinewood Reservoir is a scenic little fishing hole at the end of the main road and the campgrounds offer soothing views of the water and foothills.

But this time of year, the closed campgrounds are a ghost town and only the heartiest of anglers brave the persistent biting wind to fish the shrinking reservoir. The hikers and mountain bikers have had their fill of the open space's 4 miles of trails that wind through the foothills and hug the shoreline.

Between now and the dead of winter offers the best time to hike the trails. Options are the 2-mile Shoshone Trail into the foothills or the 2-mile Besant Point, which hugs the west shore of Pinewood.

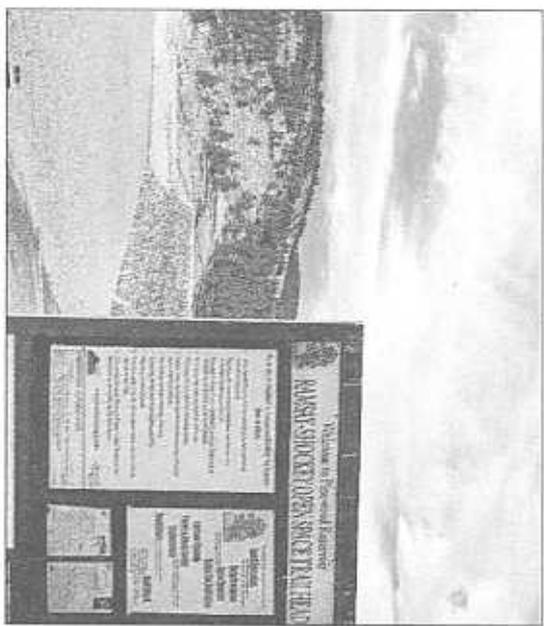
This time of year, the elk start moving from their summer range at higher elevation to winter range at lower elevation where they graze in the property's meadows.

The resident mule deer population wanders everywhere, including setting up camp in the Whispering Pines Campground. Fewer people means increased odds of spotting a wandering coyote, with some real luck a mountain lion and possibly wild turkeys. Hawks and golden eagles

A mule deer is framed by two pines at the Whispering Pine Campground at Pinewood Reservoir on Nov. 18.



Miles Burnhardt/The Coloradan



Miles Burnhardt/The Coloradan

are more visible this time of year as they spend more time aloft searching for food.

I like to hike Ramsay-Shockey after a light snow. Even if you don't see these animals, you'll surely see their tracks, prompting your imagination to run wild and making you believe you'll see something around the next bend.

On a recent snow-less hike on the Shoshone Trail, I saw not one elk, deer coyote, mountain lion or wild turkey. But neither did I see another person. I walked alone with eyes and ears tuned into the

Ramsay-Shockey Open Space

- > **Where:** From Loveland, head west on U.S. Highway 34 to Larimer County Road 29 (look for the sign to Carter Lake). Head south for two miles to Larimer County Road 18E and go about 8.7 miles to the trailhead at the north end of Pinewood Reservoir.
- > **What's there:** 4 miles of soft-surface trails for hiking and mountain biking with interpretive information, possibility of seeing elk, mule deer, coyotes, wild turkeys, raptors and songbirds.
- > **Cost:** \$7; must pay at the Bison Visitor Center along County Road 18E
- > **Facilities:** Restrooms
- > **Hours:** Dusk to dawn
- > **Pets:** Yes, on leash
- > **Maps:** Trail map available at the parking lot
- > **Information:** Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, 679-4570 or visit www.co.larimer.co.us/parks/ramsay.cfm

possible opportunities. No sound of conversation, just the coming and going of the foothills' ghostly wind gusts that made the pines whisper and the occasional lonely call of a crow or magpie.

That's how I like it.

Sitting on a metal picnic table tucked among ponderosa pines at Whispering Pines Campground's site No. 22, I watched the reservoir's mood switch on an off from window pane smooth to angry whitecaps.

Mesmerized by the water's mood swings, I was half-startled by movement behind me. I looked around to find four curious mule deer doing a little people watching from 10 yards away.

That's solitude

Eyes on eagles



Reporter-Herald photos/CHRISTOPHER STARK

Larimer County volunteer naturalist Carl Sorrentino, center, talks with Dave Metcalf, Olivia Hutton, Gary Warner and Trish Warner during an eagle walk at Fossil Creek Open Space on Dec. 18.

Eagle watchers brave weather to glimpse, learn about raptors

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Olivia Hutton looked up to the sky as a bald eagle soared over Fossil Creek Reservoir.

Its wingspan, typically 6 feet (or as wide as Nicolas Cage is tall), seemed majestic as it glided toward the cottonwood tree in which it would roost.

"It's cool," said Hutton, a Fort Collins resident.

"I just wish it was warmer."

She was one of four residents who braved subzero temperatures on a recent Thursday evening to watch eagles with Larimer County volunteer naturalist Carl Sorrentino.



Trish Warner of Loveland watches bald eagles as her husband, Gary, listens to volunteer naturalist Carl Sorrentino talk about the birds' behavior.

The temperatures do not feel as cold for the bald eagles who winter here from Saskatchewan, Canada, said Sorrentino of Windsor.

"This is the Riviera for them," he said.

He and other volunteer naturalists offer a look at and information about eagles Thursdays at the open space between Loveland and Fort Collins.

Some Thursdays are warmer than others, so make sure to check the forecast and dress for the weather. Three eagle watchers fled to their warm car on Dec. 18 after about 15 minutes, because they didn't have insulated boots and coats.

The walk portion of Larimer County's Eagle Watch is short, to the end of a paved sidewalk.

The information on eagles, however, is much more extensive, from what they eat (fish and small mammals) to their place in history (as the American symbol as well as the symbol of other, much older cul-

If You Go

What: Eagle Watch, an opportunity to view and learn about bald eagles in Larimer County. The walk portion is short and on a paved sidewalk.

When: 4:30-5:45 p.m. every Thursday in January, including today.

Where: Fossil Creek Reservoir, located off Colorado 392 (Carpenter Road) just west of Interstate 25. The driveway to the open space is on the north side of the road.

How much: Free.

More information: 679-4561.

tures), according to Sorrentino.

Eagles can be very precise hunters, but they only hunt if they have to. These raptors would much rather steal a fresh kill from osprey or eat animals they find dead, Sorrentino said.

"The eagle is an opportunist," he described.

This is one reason Founding

Father Benjamin Franklin wrote to his daughter saying he would rather have the turkey — an honest, hard worker — as the national symbol over the eagle.

Eagles return to the same nest, year after year, in the spring to hatch eaglets, or to a nest abandoned by another pair of raptors. The largest nest ever recorded, Sorrentino said, weighed 2 tons after decades of birds expanding their home.

This year, Sorrentino has seen as many as 22 eagles at Fossil Creek Reservoir. Last winter, naturalists counted 32.

Sorrentino loves to watch them through field glasses and with the bare eye as they soar over Larimer County. And he loves to share his expertise about eagles.

"I'm fascinated by the way they live, the way they fly," said Sorrentino. "The eagle has been a symbol, for our nation and clear back to the Assyrians, of strength and agility.

"It's just a super bird."



Bald eagles roost in a cluster of trees on Dec. 18 at Fossil Creek Open Space. The eagles can be viewed at dusk when they are coming back to their roost after a day of hunting. According to Carl Sorrentino, the eagles hunt for food as far away as Barr Lake near Denver while spending the winters in Colorado.