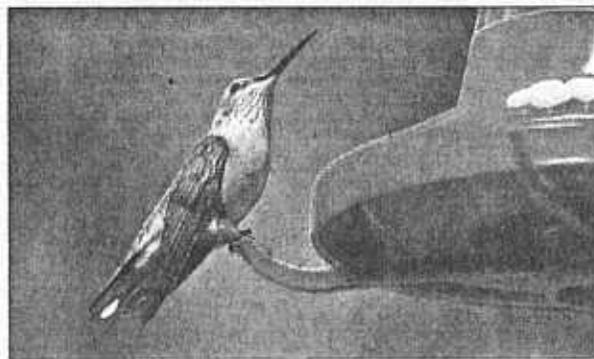


NATURE'S COURSE



Courtesy of Marjorie Morningstar

Marjorie Morningstar caught this broad-tailed hummingbird at a friend's feeder near Horsetooth Reservoir on Sept. 19, 2008. Send your high-resolution wildlife, nature, fishing and hunting images, jpegs or prints with photo captions to Xplore editor Miles Blumhardt at MilesBlumhardt@coloradoan.com or 1300 Riverside Ave., Fort Collins, CO 80524. Images will not be returned. Blumhardt can be reached at 224-7743. You can also post photos online by visiting www.coloradoan.com/connect.

JANUARY 17, 2009

Voice your easement input to Parks and Rec board

To the editor:

Now available: Parking spaces on the banks of the Big Thompson and North Fork Rivers.

Canyon properties being sold by Larimer County have added a new exemption, a 14-foot access road and 10-foot easement along the river bank on each of these parcels. No restrictions, no supervision.

This change from established parcel sales is driven by fishing clubs. Decision-making Parks and Recreation board members are also avid fishing club members and owners of fishing enterprises. All have the attention of the fishing desires and seem to turn a deaf ear to any contrary input.

Residents, fishermen, commuters, tourists, see it in your mind. See the vans, cars, tailgate setups parked in front of the river. See the debris, the toilet issues, no boundary recognition between one lot and the next, unfamiliar rules varying from one parcel to the next, arguments, self-preservation activities forced on homeowners.

Not all people who use the river are gentlemen anglers and naturalists. Patrol for licenses, permits and availability of officers to handle the in-

evitable disputes is limited. Fishermen are vulnerable to being negatively impacted as well, also subject to any ungod, less-desirable advantage taken of this easement.

At the Jan. 13 Parks and Recreation meeting I saw a thinly-veiled attitude of "We are tired of your repeated complaints. Get over it. We've made up our minds."

Orange stakes are setting along the river bank at the southwest end of Drake. Take a look. The precedent is set.

What is evolving here? Appropriation of "private" river frontage? What special-interest group is next? What other area is appealing? Next the Poudre? Right or wrong, they can pretty much do what they want and are.

We discovered the 14-foot right-of-way and 10-foot easement, though it is actually happening at Drake, does not have official commissioner approval yet.

Please come, listen and voice your opinions at a "final" public discussion meeting with the Parks and Recreation Department at the Community Building, at the east end of Drake at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday. Call 667-3239, 532-3898 or 667-6465 with questions.

Dianne Honstein,
president Big Thompson
Canyon Association

Mountain pine beetle on move in Larimer County

Dave Lentz

Open spaces

Mountain pine beetle, the insect that has devastated the lodgepole pine forests of the Western Slope over the past 12 years, is now working to establish itself on the Front Range. It made a big move in the 2008 flight.

Two important tools are used to evaluate the spread of the beetle in Colorado: aerial surveys by the U.S. Forest Service and Colorado State Forest Service and ground observations by the public and the many foresters of different agencies.

The 2008 aerial survey has just been released. In Colorado, 400,000 new acres were affected from the 2007 beetle flight for a total of nearly 2 million acres affected since 1996. In Larimer County, 188,900 new acres are affected for a total of 259,000 acres affected since 1996. The resulting maps from the aerial survey are a year behind the actual flight of the beetle.

Before we move to what has been observed on the ground, here's a fast review of the beetle:

> The beetle is native to western North America.

> At the time of flight, the adult beetle is black and is 1/8-inch to 1/3-inch in size, about the size of a grain of rice.

> The beetles fly from mid-July through September with mass flight occurring mid-July to early August, depending on the species of the tree. The beetles mass attack new green trees shortly after the flight begins.

> The beetles then breed and lay eggs along a main gallery chamber just

under the bark of the tree. The eggs will hatch about two weeks later, and the larva will start feeding and continue feeding throughout the fall. The larva over-winter under the bark and then resume feeding in the spring.

> The larva pupate in June and July, and new adults will start the cycle all over again.

> Trees that have been successfully attacked in mid-July through September will generally stay green and not fade until the next May, June or July.

In the 2008 flight, the beetles moved a longer distance than is normally expected. The reasons for this are unclear. You may have seen articles concerning beetles within city limits along Interstate 25. Please contact city foresters for local information. Outside the city limits, there are many newly affected trees in the Virginia Dale, Cherokee Park, Glacier View Meadows and Stove Prairie areas. Now is the time to identify these trees and begin treatments.

For treatment options, contact me at 498-5765, send e-mail to dclentz@larimer.org or contact the Colorado State Forest Service at 491-8660. For more information on beetles, visit www.larimer.org/forestry.

Dave Lentz is the Larimer County forester. Call him at 498-5765 or send e-mail to dclentz@larimer.org.



Reporter-Herald/PAMELA DICKMAN

Heavy equipment may seem out of place in nature, but Steve McCorkel uses this loader to improve fish habitat on a section of the Big Thompson River west of Loveland earlier this week. McCorkel, a construction supervisor with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, drove the machine right into the river to place boulders and large shovelfuls of rock that were too heavy for workers to move by hand.

Bank deposits

Big T project helps rebuild trout habitat

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Travis Rollins walked along the bank of the Big Thompson River west of Loveland and pointed out more than a dozen fish swimming in new, deeper pools.

"Isn't it amazing," said Rollins, manager of a handful of county open spaces.

"Look at all those fish."

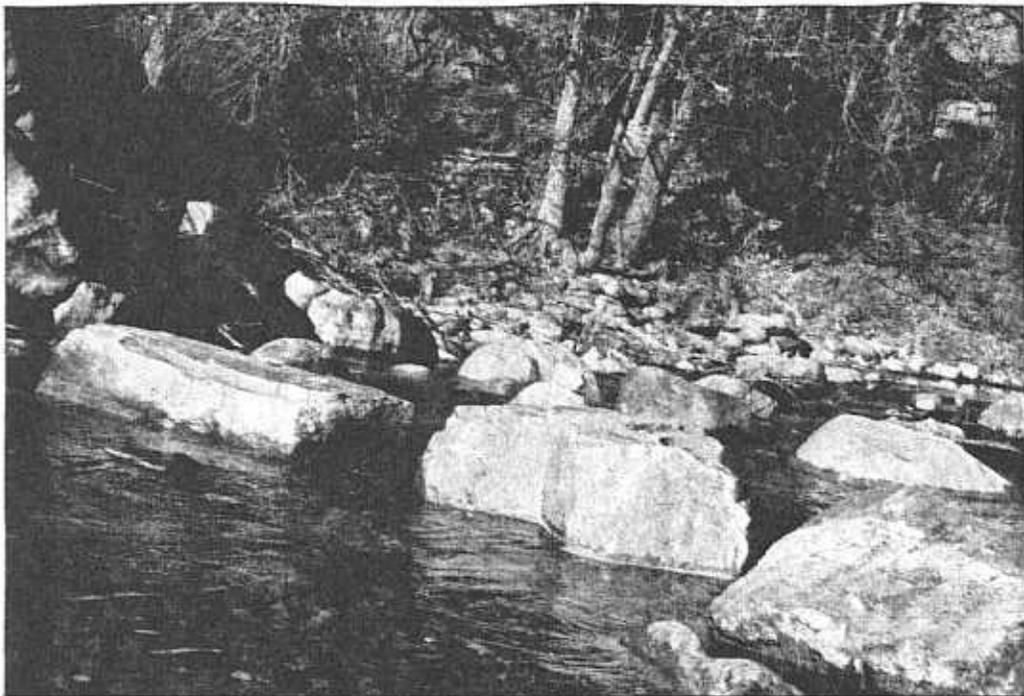


Reporter-Herald graphic/KATE WYMAN

Earlier this week, Larimer County parks staff members and Colorado Division of Wildlife biologists finished trout habitat improvements to the stretch of the river that borders Glade Park, just west of Loveland off Glade

Road. They hoped fish would begin to use the habitat, and many trout were the day after the work was finished.

SEE HABITAT, PAGE A2



Reporter-Herald/PAMELA DICKMAN

Colorado Division of Wildlife biologists specially selected large boulders for their size, shape and how they fit into the riverbed to enhance trout habitat in the Big Thompson River. The boulders create breaks in the current where fish expend less energy, and deeper pockets in the riverbed provide protection from predators.

HABITAT: Biologists assisted in stream rehabilitation

FROM PAGE A1

"You can see, if you do it right, how effective it is," Rollins said.

The work crew added two deep pools in the riverbed, shored up the banks to prevent erosion and added large boulders to help improve and maintain a healthy habitat for trout during the winter, when water levels are lower.

"The fish can live longer and grow bigger, and there's more of them," Rollins said.

Before the project started, biologists counted 341 brown trout in a 480-foot stretch of the river. Of those, 48 were 10 inches or longer, and only one was longer than 18 inches. The average size was 7.7 inches.

Biologists plan to return next winter to recount and see if the improvements are helping.

The team basically tripled the number of large, deep pools for trout in that stretch of river — an essential habitat for fish to survive the winter, said Division of Wildlife biologist Matt Kondratrieff.

He and his colleagues determined where the river could best naturally support and maintain those pools.

They also selected specific large boulders from a project last summer at Carter Lake to help with stream flow and to naturally main-

tain the pools.

"They all have a purpose," said construction supervisor Steve McCorkel, the man controlling a front-end loader that placed the 1- to 4-ton boulders.

"These were specifically picked out by biologists and specially placed."

From the river itself, McCorkel carefully located each boulder with a heavy equipment claw — like a giant version of the arcade claws that challenge people to grab a toy.

A Colorado Division of Wildlife Fishing is Fun grant paid for the \$80,000 project, which will also include a refurbished parking lot, a new vault bathroom and handicapped access to the river at Glade Park.

The grant also covers lot and bathroom improvements to three other popular fishing spots: the Narrows, the Forks and Sleepy Hollow.

That work will begin this spring and summer.

The grant aims to improve fish habitat, but at the same time the work saved a large cottonwood tree by shoring up eroded banks of the river, created deeper sections of the river and added boulders where waders can sit and dip their feet, Kondratrieff said.

"Hopefully, we provided some good habitat for people too," he said with a laugh.

Fate of Big T parcel liquid

Comment period under way

By KATHRYN DAILEY
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

In two months, a final decision could be made about the fate of 2.6 acres of Larimer County-owned property in Drake that has caused a stir among neighbors and regional fishermen.

The lots in the Hayden subdivision, acquired after the 1976 Big

Thompson flood, have become a point of contention between landowners who experience public abuses such as loitering and drinking, and fishermen and retention advocates who want the properties kept for public access.

Tuesday began a 60-day public

comment period before the county Parks Advisory Board makes a final recommendation that the county commissioners will decide on, said Barry Lewis, the board's vice chairman, Tuesday night during a meeting.

The county lots are on both sides

of the river, and the main differences among three options being considered by the board are the amount of land available on the east side of the river in the residential area and the public pedestrian access.

The options are:

- The county would retain own-

SEE BIG T, PAGE A2

BIG T: Majority of board would like property retained

FROM PAGE A1

ship from the U.S. 34 right-of-way through the river corridor up to 5- to 10-foot-wide above the top of the east bank of the river and would allow for public access.

The county would reserve a 5- to 10-foot-wide access easement through a single lot inside the Hayden subdivision for public pedestrian access.

• The second option would be the same as the first, but without public pedestrian access in the Hayden subdivision.

• In the third option, the county would retain ownership from U.S. 34 right-of-way to the bottom of the east bank of the river for public access, and no public pedestrian access to the river would be allowed from the Hayden subdivision.

Fourteen people commented during the meeting — three in favor of the first option and the rest in favor of the third.

Mike Barczewski, a member

of the retention group Friends of the Big Thompson, favored option one and said he understands landowners' concerns.

"I sometimes get very, very angry when I go fishing and see the access points we have trashed," he said.

"... Let's all work together as a coalition and improve the condition of the river."

Dianne Honstein, who lives in the canyon, said she would like to work with the fishermen but doesn't believe landowners' interests have been thoroughly considered.

"I was a little dismayed that most of the advisory board is very pro-fishing, and it sticks on recreation where we (the residents) are part of the parks," said Honstein, who voiced her approval for the third option.

Drake resident Sherry Stroh has owned property there for more than a year and would like to see the county lots sold because the property owners are the ones who clean up the messes left by the public, she

said.

"If we owned the whole thing out, it would stay (clean)," said Stroh, who reminded the board that during a January meeting on the subject, almost all of the 75 people present wanted to see the third option chosen.

A majority of the board members who spoke on the issue indicated they would like to see some property in the subdivision retained due to the high quality of fishing and to help avoid fishermen trespassing when they step on the other side of the river to rest.

It would be difficult to define the county's property line on the east edge of the river, because it changes depending on the season, said board member Frank Cada.

"In order to safely have access to the river, it's important to have a buffer area defined also," he said.

 **ON THE NET:** To give public comment on the options, go to www.larimer.org/naturalresources.

Local anglers misjudged in Big T quest

One can't help but get the impression from newspaper articles, letters and calls in recent weeks that some residents in the Big Thompson Canyon view local anglers as little more than a wild bunch of hard-partying hippies hell bent on laying waste to the land, threatening nearby residents and conducting summer-night pot parties into the wee hours.

They even suggest, in some instances, that they bathe in the nude, leave mountains of beer cans, dirty diapers, soiled toilet paper and other sewage in their wake.

Worse, they say, these trespassing scoundrels are angling to take private property from the locals and claim it as their own.

Well, nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, if anyone is guilty of encroachment, it may very well be the locals themselves who have chosen to park their vehicles and RVs on these public



Dennis Smith
Home Waters

parcels in violation of the law, or set up picnic tables and chairs on them as if they owned the parcels and not the public.

That's not very nice.

The vast majority of fishermen who frequent the Big Thompson River these days — or at least the ones I know — are fly fishermen and, by nature, some of the most passionate conservationists and environmentalists on the planet.

They are far more likely to be found toting out somebody else's trash in their vests than leaving any of their own behind — though, to be fair about it, there are admittedly slob fishermen around, but their numbers pale in comparison.

By and large, fishermen don't abuse the resource that is at the

heart of their recreation; they do their best to protect it and improve it.

The record clearly shows local anglers have helped build handicap-access platforms for the disabled, financed hydrological stream improvement projects and successfully lobbied for catch-and-release-regulations on the Big Thompson.

In truth, the presence of a concerned, active angling population on these properties is more likely to enhance their value than detract from it, and discourage the bad behavior of others in the process.

Neither are fishermen "demanding access" or "invading the privacy and space of locals." They are simply asking the county commissioners to honor the terms of the agreement made with the federal government nearly 30 years ago when the county defined these parcels as "high-value recreation properties" and promised to main-

tain them in the public trust in perpetuity.

These properties belong to all the citizens of Larimer County, purchased for them, in part, with federal funds and entrusted to the care of the county commissioners.

The only "special interests" that anglers represent are the interests of the public at large. They should be applauded for their activism, not condemned.

If anything, local anglers have demonstrated their respect for the needs of canyon residents by their willingness to surrender access on some properties in exchange for minimal buffer zones along the banks of others that would actually direct foot traffic away from the local homeowners.

And by the way, I seriously doubt any anglers willing to drop nearly a grand on Gortex waders, Patagonia wading jackets and high-tech vests

SEE HOMEWATERS, PAGE B2

HOMEWATERS: Turkey banquet

FROM PAGE B1

would deliberately choose to fish in the nude. Nor do many anglers I know wear diapers, though a few of us may be dangerously close.

And now, on a completely different note — The Larimer County Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Foundation will be hosting its annual Hunting Heritage Super Fund Raiser Banquet in the First National Bank Building, 5280 Arena Circle, Suite 100 at the Larimer County Fairgrounds on Saturday, Feb. 7. Doors open at 4:30 p.m., dinner will be served at 6 p.m.

The National Wild Turkey Foundation is dedicated to the conservation of wild turkeys and preservation of the hunt-

ing heritage.

Since 1973 the foundation has helped the turkey population in North America increase from 1.3 million to more than 7 million birds.

Hunting Heritage banquets combine fun, fellowship, fundraising and dedication to the wild turkey. They're a great place to meet friends who share your passion for the outdoors, win valuable prizes and buy items unique to the foundation.

Dennis Smith is a Loveland outdoors writer and photographer, and his freelance work is published nationally. Smith's Home Waters column appears on the first and third Thursdays of the month. He can be reached at Dsmith7136@msn.com.

← Continued

Forum set on Big T

By KATHRYN DAILEY
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Public invited to share thoughts on fl

DRAKE — Big Thompson Canyon residents and area fishermen all feel invested in a small piece of property near the river in Drake.

The piece in question is a 2.6-acre Big Thompson flood surplus property that is currently owned by Larimer County and has become the subject of debate as to whether it should be sold or retained for public access.

Residents deal with the public coming into their neighborhood and causing problems such as loitering, drinking, swimming nude, urinating in the open and even leaving dirty diapers on the property. Many also feel that there are miles upon miles of fishing spots available along the canyon.

However, many fishermen and retention advocates want the Drake area property to be kept for the public because of its good access and scenic atmosphere. Larimer County

Natural Resources staffers may have found a solution to allow both parties a little of what they want. The county wants to designate the river and 10-foot buffers on either side to be retained for the use of fishermen.

Under the proposed plan, the rest of the parcel will be sold, said Natural Resources Director Gary Buffington. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the plan Tuesday during a meeting in Drake.

The river is currently accessed from two sides, one from inside the small Drake neighborhood and one from U.S. 34 as it goes toward Estes Park.

"The draft plan will indicate some foot traffic on the residential side of the river, but not vehicle traffic," Buffington said.

Some residents are still concerned about the public being in their neighborhood, Buffington said.

"This is a bad plan," said Dianne Honstein, a Canyon resident, who does not live in Drake, but whose husband is on the board of directors at the Chapel of the Interlude, which sits across the street from the Drake property.

Honstein, a third-generation Big Thompson resident, also lives near some surplus property and experiences many of the same problems that the Drake residents have with the public. And for residents who love the land as much as Honstein, she wants the surplus properties to be sold and protected, she said.

"There's not good access to these parcels, but we want to buy them and leave them as they are," she said of the lots near her property.

Honstein feels like the county has changed the rules on her and other residents, because of the current plan they're looking to imple-

canyon land

ood-surplus parcel **RII** If You Go

ment, she said.

In 2005, the county commissioners approved an action plan for the Big Thompson properties. They identified 65 properties that they felt were not suitable for public access. They were usually adjacent to private property and would be offered first to direct descendants of the former owners or to adjacent property owners for sale, then to the public.

However, the county's Web site does state the plan could change as the county goes through the process.

"My purpose was to sound an alarm that would ring and stimulate people," Honstein said, adding that she and the other residents don't have any problems with the "gentlemen fishermen" who come up, but that those are not the people who frequent some of the spaces.

"I want to have people there (at the meeting in Drake) so we can come

What: Public meeting about the Big Thompson flood surplus property in Drake
When: 6:30 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Big Thompson Canyon Community Building on U.S. 34 east of Drake
Online: www.larimer.org/naturalresources

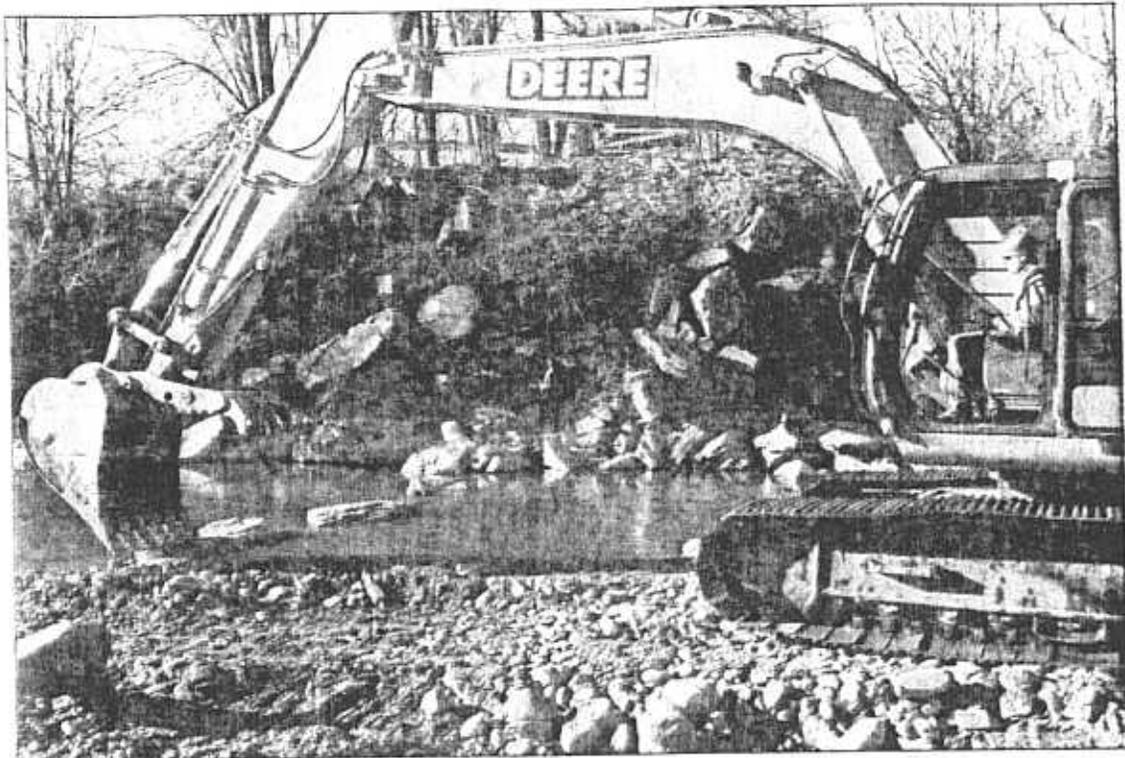
up with some solutions."

George Kral, past president of the Loveland Fishing Club, agrees that some of the problems have arisen from fishermen who don't take care of the space that they're using.

"I wish that other fishermen would just take care of their responsibilities," he said. But Kral feels the property in Drake is an asset to the canyon and wants it retained because of its beauty and easy access for children and people in wheelchairs, he said.

"We've got to keep these things open for them," Kral said.

Continued →



Reporter-Herald/PAMELA DICKMAN

Heavy equipment may seem out of place in nature, but Steve McCorkel uses this loader to improve fish habitat on a section of the Big Thompson River west of Loveland earlier this week. McCorkel, a construction supervisor with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, drove the machine right into the river to place boulders and large shovelfuls of rock that were too heavy for workers to move by hand.

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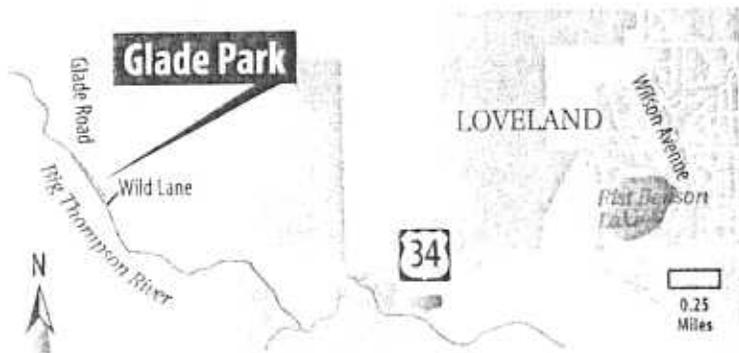
Big T project helps rebuild trout habitat

BY PAMELA DICKMAN
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SEE HABITAT, PAGE A2



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HABITAT: Biologists assisted in stream rehabilitation

FROM PAGE A1

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"Hopefully, we provided some good habitat for people too," he said with a laugh.

Become a volunteer ranger assistant

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I used to get asked this question quite a bit. For me, the answer was always a park ranger. Well, I'm not a park ranger today, and some of you who may have wanted to be a park ranger might be in the same situation as me. Fear not, the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources and the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program can help by offering the public an opportunity to become a volunteer ranger assistant.

These volunteers hike trails on county open lands and city natural areas. They interact with the public in a number of ways. Usually these interactions are just a hello and a smile and sometimes to answer a

Rob Novak

Open spaces

question. Other times, volunteers encourage folks to keep the area's regulations in mind by highlighting the connection of the regulations to the valuable resources they are there to enjoy.

Volunteer ranger assistants receive approximately 20 hours of training before they hit the trails on their own. There are two classroom sessions where volunteers learn how to handle emergencies, interact with the public and discuss some of the situations they are likely to encounter on the trail.

These sessions are combined with a field day where volunteers practice public

interaction, acting out common scenarios they are likely to encounter. Volunteers then hike alongside an experienced volunteer ranger assistant to see how it all works on the trails.

This is a great program for folks who want to get out and learn more about the over 120 miles of trails available to the public in Larimer County. You'll also meet other people who love what they're doing.

Often, volunteers will hike together in groups and share the volunteer duties for the day. You'll get to interact with and help a wide variety of people, making the position perfect for active social butterflies. The program also is a great way to get exercise, meet new people and give back to the community by assisting our county and

natural area rangers.

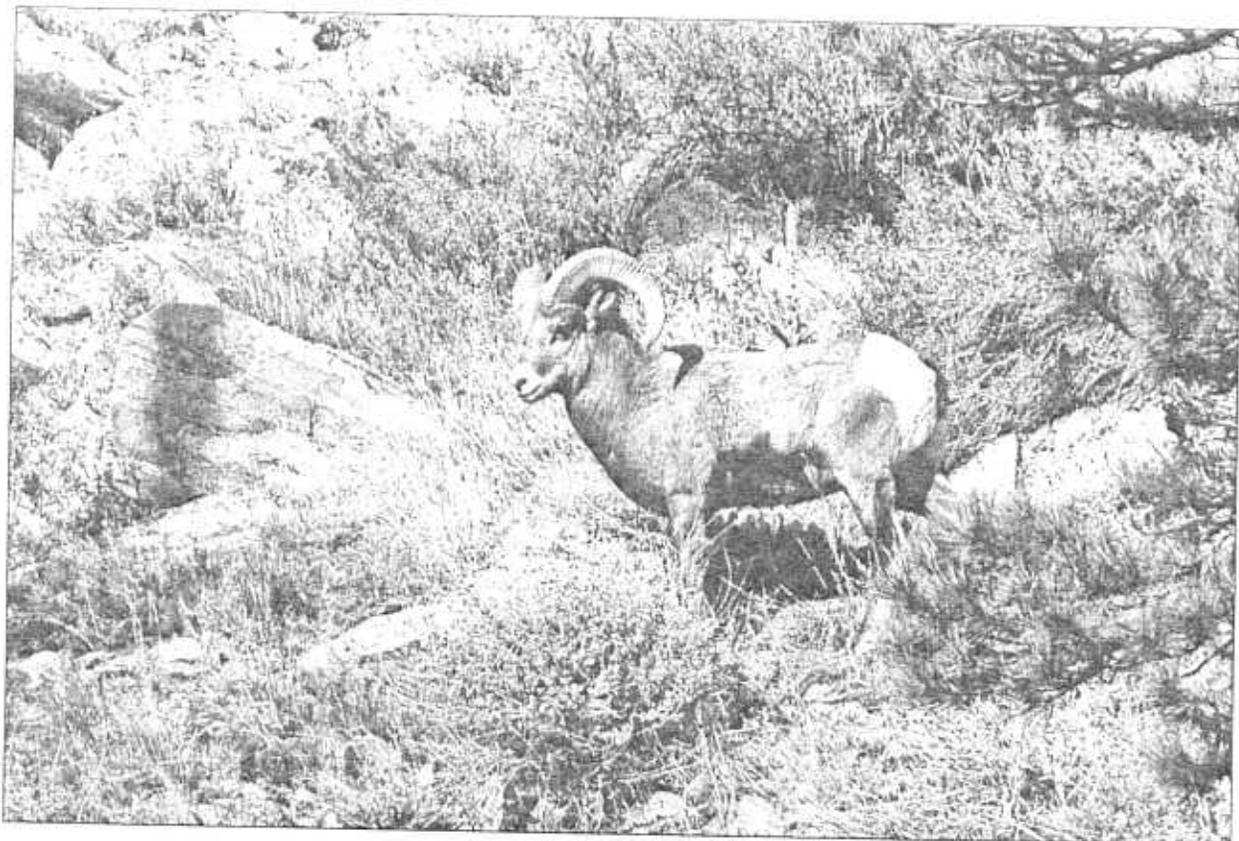
So if you're like I was at age 10 and found yourself taking a new direction later in life, don't worry. You can lend a helping hand to the rangers in our system and the visitors who hike, bike and ride our trails. Volunteers receive a uniform and are able to hike in fee areas for free. It's all the best parts of the job, without any of the hassle.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer ranger assistant, there will be a training course held in February. More information and applications can be found online at www.fc.gov.com/rangers/volunteers.

Rob Novak is the education program coordinator for Larimer County Natural Resources. Call 679-4561 or send e-mail to rnovak@larimer.org.

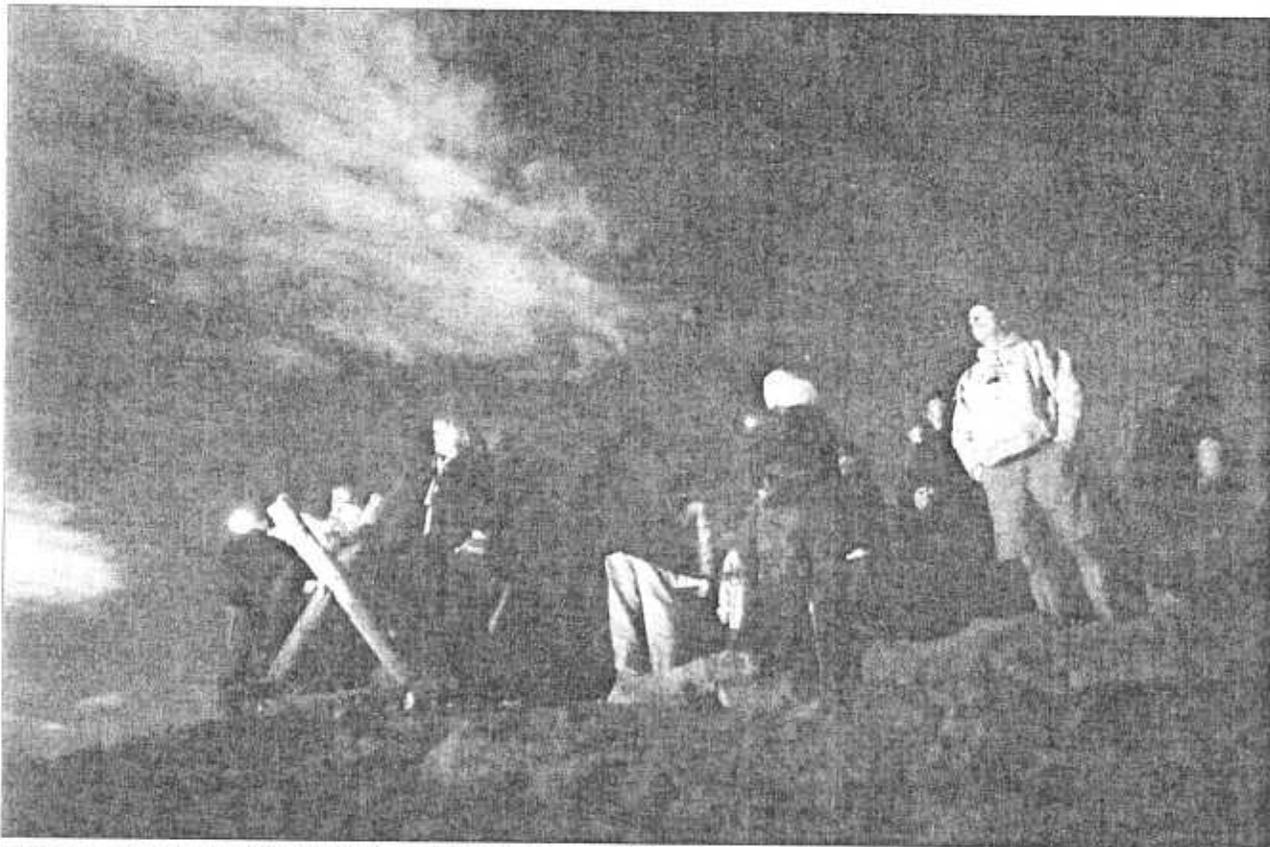
The Coloradoan, Sunday, January 11, 2009, E3

NATURE'S COURSE



Courtesy of Bill Ciesla

Bill Ciesla of Fort Collins took this image of a bighorn sheep ram in the Big Thompson Canyon on Oct. 31. Send your high-resolution wildlife, nature, fishing and hunting images, jpegs or prints, with photo captions to Xplore editor Miles Blumhardt at MilesBlumhardt@coloradoan.com or 1300 Riverside Ave. Fort Collins, CO 80524. Images will not be returned. He can be reached at 224-7743. You can also post them online by visiting www.coloradoan.com/connect.



Hikers stand under a full moon Thursday while atop a hill at Devil's Backbone Open Space. Naturalists led a hike 'The Moon in Myth and Legend,' which included stops for participants to catch their breath and learn from local naturalists about the moon's significance in science and culture. Below left, stars sparkle over the namesake rock formation at Devil's Backbone Open Space. A long exposure combined with use of artificial flash created the look of this photograph, revealing both the details in the rock as well as the stars overhead.



Participants leave the trailhead for a hike under the full moon at Devil's Backbone Open Space on Thursday. The mild evening drew more than 70 hikers for a rare opportunity to experience the scenic Larimer County Open Space by night.

UNDER THE MOONLIGHT

Photos by Bradley Wakoff
Loveland Connection

Naturally drawn to hogbacks

Devil's Backbone inspires local artist

By KATHRYN DAILEY
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

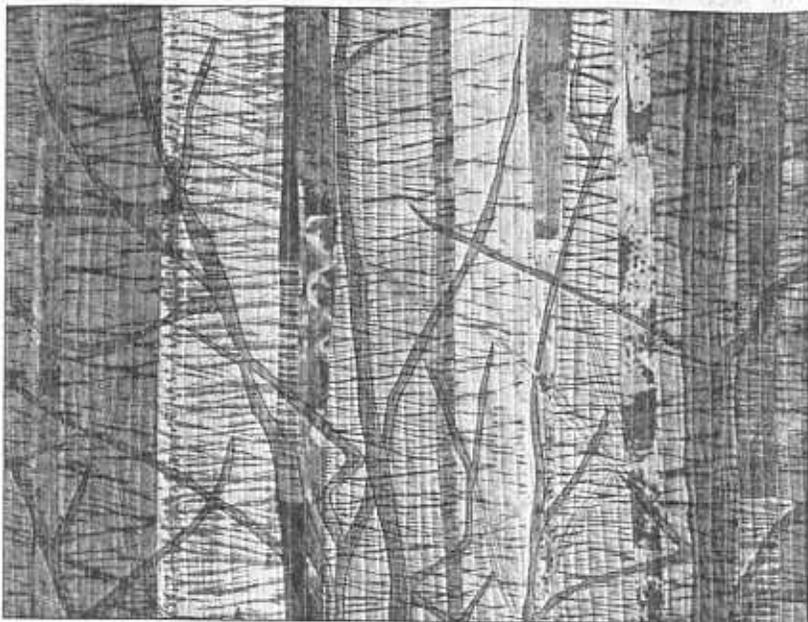
Patty Hawkins' father was a geologist, and it was he who helped her see the beauty in rock formations.

So when Hawkins was chosen to create a piece of artwork inspired by one of the Larimer County open spaces as part of the Larimer County Open Lands Visual Artist Program, she was naturally drawn to the Devil's Backbone Open Space.

"I've just been absolutely intrigued by hogbacks," said the textile artist, who created a fabric collage that will hang outside the Larimer County Board of Commissioners office in Fort Collins.

Hawkins passes the Devil's Backbone each day as she drives along U.S. 34 on her way to and from her home in Estes Park. And each day she finds herself fascinated with the way it looks during the sunrise and sunset, she said.

"It's such a beautiful silhouette, and you can't just help but want to pull over to the side of the road to enjoy it," she said.



Special to the Reporter-Herald/PATTY HAWKINS

"Light of Day" illustrates the ability of Patty Hawkins to build subtle colors using various dye techniques. Hawkins was chosen to create a piece of artwork inspired by one of the county's open spaces for the Larimer County Open Lands Visual Artist Program.

It took Hawkins weeks to finish the piece, which is made up of fabric that she dyed herself.

It also required her to challenge herself to create something new other than the aspens she usually makes in her collages and to use new fabric-dyeing techniques.

It was the uniqueness of her artwork that won her the title of 2008 Visual Artist for the county, said Open Lands tech Justin Scharton, who runs the program.

"This is a completely different medium," he said. "There's all these different, fun prints."

The program, which is meant to increase awareness of the county's open spaces while promoting local artists, started in 2006.

Former Larimer County commissioner Jim Disney won in 2006 and 2007.

The artists donate the pieces they create to the county, and the art remains displayed in a county building, Scharton said.

The artists also are required to host one program such as an artist demonstration for the public in the county's open space.

A reception to celebrate Hawkins and her piece will be held 3 p.m. Wednesday at the Larimer County Courthouse Offices Building, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins.

 **ON THE NET:** For more information about Hawkins or the program, go to www.larimer.org/openlands/artist.htm.

How to deal with region's most common noxious weed problem

Canada thistle is the most common noxious weed problem in Colorado and most states in the Rocky Mountain region. This exotic species was first introduced from Eurasia to the U.S. 400 years ago. It has since spread to 42 U.S. states and the Canadian provinces.

A detriment to the environment and economy of Colorado, this pesky thistle negatively affects agriculture and natural areas. Comprehensive information on the biology of this species can be obtained from CSU at www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/natres/03108.html.

Canada thistle can be controlled by diligent land managers and private landowners; but persistence is required. A combination of management efforts can remove the majority of a Canada thistle infestation in two to three years but subsequent follow-up spot treatments might be necessary for several years.

Best management recommendations

> Cultural control:

Establishment of competitive desirable vegetation is the bottom line for management of any noxious weed. Weeds do best when invading disturbed sites, so by maintaining a vigorous stand of competing vegetation, weed problems are minimized. Grasses provide the best competition because of their tolerance to mowing and to most herbicides used for control of Canada thistle. If grasses are not present in a problem area, then seeding is necessary. If grasses are present at all, the densities should increase as Canada thistle decreases.

> Mowing/grazing:

Removal of Canada thistle above-ground will stimulate regrowth, which reduces carbohydrate reserves within the root system and weakens the plant. Canada

Tim D'Amato

Open spaces

thistle is palatable to livestock until the plants begin to dry down. Grazing needs to be monitored for adverse effects on desirable grasses, otherwise this management tool becomes counter productive. Mowing Canada thistle at the early flower stage maximizes stress on the plant's carbohydrate reserves. Mowing/grazing alone will not control Canada thistle but used in conjunction with a fall herbicide application provides excellent control.

> Herbicide application: Provides the most effective control of any perennial weed, particularly when applied in the fall following summer mowing/grazing. The most beneficial time to apply is September or October, prior to a hard frost. Recommendations for the most effective herbicides for controlling Canada thistle can be obtained from the Larimer County Weed District, (970) 498-5769.

Alternatives

> Hand pulling/clipping: Not effective for controlling Canada thistle infestations unless one is extremely persistent. Above ground growth is the tip of the iceberg and hand pulling, at least on larger areas, is seldom feasible.

> Insect bio-control: Not effective. Experts with Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado State University and USDA do not recommend insect releases for control of Canada thistle even though insect agents are available.

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

Commissioned artist puts Loveland landmark on quilt

BY KEVIN DUGGAN
For Loveland Connection

Patty Hawkins finds beauty in imperfection.

But the eye is hard-pressed to find the imperfection in the quilted piece of fabric art she created as the designated visual artist for the Larimer County Natural Resources Department for 2008.

The piece, which was displayed Wednesday in the second floor lobby of the Larimer County Courthouse Offices Building, 200 W. Oak St., in Fort Collins, drew its inspiration from the Devil's Backbone Open Space west of Loveland.

The multi-hued fabric, which Hawkins dyed herself, captures the colors of rock and prairie.

Rolling stitch lines show the contours of the land.

Hawkins, who lives in Estes Park, said she loves the silhouette of the hog-back and the way the light plays off it.

"It just resonates for me," she said. "I cannot see it often enough. But I don't want anybody to ever take it for granted — it's way too beautiful."



Rich Abrahamson For Loveland Connection

Patty Hawkins, a quilt artist, is pictured with her quilt that depicts Devil's Backbone. It is displayed at the Larimer County Courthouse Offices Building in Fort Collins.

The county's visual artist program is modeled on the artist in residence program at Rocky Mountain National Park.

The designated artist is given access to all of the county's parks and open lands, even those that are not open to the public.

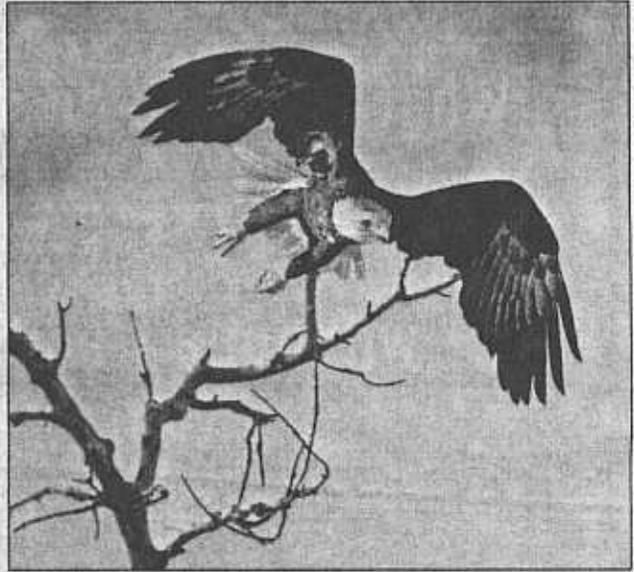
In return, the artist creates a piece that is displayed outside the county commissioners' office for a year.

Hawkins said she enjoys working on small pieces that have big impact.

"We fabric artists don't want our work to look like placemats," she said.

APPLY FOR '09

- The Larimer County Natural Resources Department is accepting applications from professional artists to serve as the 2009 Visual Artist of the Year. The deadline to apply is Feb. 27.
- Information: www.larimer.org/openlands/artist.htm or 679-4489



Courtesy of Vic Schendel

A bald eagle takes flight from its perch in a cottonwood tree last month. February is prime time to see our national symbol.

Watchers flocking to see bald eagles

BY MILES BLUMHARDT
For Loveland Connection

Bald eagles have captivated Americans for hundreds of years.

Maybe it's because they are our national symbol.

Maybe it's because no other bird has such distinctive features.

Maybe it's because of their sheer size, which from wing tip to wing tip measures more than the average-size man.

"Nothing impresses people more than bald eagles," said **Rob Novak**, education program coordinator for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources who helps lead the department's Eagle Watch Program at Fossil Creek Regional Open Space.

What's even more

See where you can spot the most bald eagles, Page 13

impressive to those who attend the weekly winter talks is that they can actually see bald eagles in Larimer County.

"There is utter surprise for a lot of people that they migrate here," Novak said. "The talks serve as a great learning opportunity."

Jacob Wells, a department ranger who leads the county's raptor monitoring program, said there are on average 45 bald eagles that migrate to Larimer County from November through March.

He said February usually draws the highest count.

BEAUTIFUL DAY FOR BIRDING



Alan Caldwell of Fort Collins takes advantage of the sunny weather to scope out bald eagles Tuesday at the Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space. High temperatures hit 60 degrees Tuesday and are expected to hover around 70 by Thursday, but a westerly wind promises to bring a change in the weather by the weekend.

For a complete forecast, see Page B12.

Photos by V. Richard Haro
The Coloradoan

