

Coyotes can be cute, but beware, they're dangerous

Coyotes have been getting a lot of bad press lately and in some cases well deserved.

With a recent increase in their population, they have become troublesome to livestock and domestic pets. They are rascals by nature. Native American lore is full of their mischievous exploits. But they are lovable rascals, and you can't help but admire them.

The coyote (properly pronounced "kai'outi", but out West it's best said "kaiout" if you don't want to be branded a tenderfoot) is found nearly everywhere in North America from downtown Los Angeles to the open spaces of Larimer County. Every attempt to exterminate them has failed. They are opportunists, entrepreneurs and the ultimate survivor. They are true Americans.

When you go out to Larimer County's parks and open lands, there may be an opportunity to observe these fascinating and beautiful critters. They are easier to view and less skittish than 50 years ago

Charles Gindler

Open spaces

when everyone shot at them. If you spot one or a group traveling, hunting or playing, it's a real treat to take a seat by the side of the trail and pull out the binoculars to watch the show.

Coyotes have a reputation for snacking at MacDonald's or on the dog food in your garage or on your cat at the back porch. But they are also very efficient hunters in the wild. You'll often see a single coyote stalking rodents in tall grass, leaping high in the air to pounce on their prey. Sometimes, you'll see mom training a couple of youngsters to cut off a rabbit before it can get to its hideout. Two or more may hunt an area, trying to flush larger game with intricately choreographed attacks of chase, feint, surround and close. Coyotes keep the land clean. A few families can reduce a deer dead of chronic wasting disease to

slick bones in a day.

Coyotes are very curious. Everything is food to them. They may come close to you, hoping you have scared up a mouse or looking for handouts. Never feed them. Although coyotes are usually not dangerous, if they get uncomfortably close, a shout will usually drive them off. You should back away cautiously at any sign of aggressive or rabid behavior. Always keep your dog on leash because several coyotes can lure them away and give the dog a good thrashing or worse just for sport.

There is nothing more enchanting when you are out for a hike in the early evening with the sunset glow fading and the stars appearing in the deep blue sky than groups of coyotes calling to each other across the valley in chattering barks and eerie, high-pitched harmonies.

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

Enjoy winter sun at our open spaces

When was the last time you felt like a kid?

Did you play in the snow like there was no tomorrow or look at the world around you with a sense of awe and wonder? We invite you this winter to a wealth of possibilities for rediscovering the beauty of the rich environment that enfolds you.

Larimer County's parks and open spaces are the place to be when it comes to having fun in the winter sun, so let's explore some of the simpler pleasures that beckon us into a reprieve from the pressures of daily life.

> Bird watching:

Birds are some of our most active wildlife, full of fascinating social displays and lively antics, aerial and terrestrial. Your family has numerous opportunities for viewing and learning about our avian friends from guided activities, including Bald Eagle Watches at Fossil Creek Reservoir. For more informal observation of jays, kingfishers, common goldfinches and other birds, venture to one of our open spaces. So grab your field guide and go. Another way to spy birds is to hang a birdfeeder outside. Feeders often attract doves, wrens, finches, waxwings and warblers.

> Wildlife tracking:

Winter is a prime time to find out who's visiting you. A great family activity is to hike or snowshoe at Horsetooth Mountain or Hermit Park open

Olivia Hutton

Open spaces

spaces with snow on the ground. It's exciting to find animal tracks that reveal active winter wildlife. You may discover paths from a bear, cougar, elk, deer, fox, beaver, raccoon, squirrel, weasel, marmot, muskrat or mouse. A tracking booklet helps reveal the prints of secret travelers in the snow.

> Fishing: Whether using a bobber or fly fishing, this is the perfect venture to bundle up and enjoy time for reflection while soaking in scenic views. Larimer County has four reservoirs — Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Horsetooth Reservoir and Pinewood Reservoir — where you can catch trout, walleye, pike, catfish or bass. Just purchase an entrance permit and a valid fishing license.

> A few extras: Make snow angels with your kids, enjoy a quiet hike, take winter photos, walk your dog, take a scenic drive, enjoy a picnic lunch on a warm winter day, watch the sunset, volunteer with the Larimer County Natural Resources Department.

To find out about these and other activities, visit www.co.larimer.co.us/parks.

Olivia Hutton is a Larimer County Natural Resources Department technician. Call her at 679-4534 or send e-mail to huttonOA@co.larimer.co.us.

Larimer County woman on trail-blazing journey

BY MEEGAN FLENNIKEN
For Loveland Connection

Kym Wolf, trail crew leader for the Larimer County Natural Resources Department, recently won the 2008 American Trails National Trail Worker award.

This award goes annually to the top trail worker in each state.

Wolf has spent the past 12 years as a professional trail crew leader for the county's trails program.

The county trail system boasts more than 59 miles of multi-user trails, which are used by residents.

About 125,000 visitors annually use the trails in Horsetooth Mountain

Open Space. More than 60,000 visit the Devil's Backbone Open Space west of Loveland.

Wolf is involved with and knowledgeable about all the trails in the Larimer County system.

She wrote the book on trail building and maintenance standards for Larimer County, which are based on current known practices and techniques in the nation.

The County Adopt-A-Trail Program is a success due in great part to Wolf's volunteer management skills, leading an average of 20 projects per year and totaling more than 16,000 volunteer trail hours annually.

She also has taken the lead with numerous other volunteer organizations that assist with trail maintenance projects, including the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps and Alternative Sentencing Units for the County Corrections Department.

The entire trail crew is known for great attitudes and willingness to pitch in on whatever project may come up.

This is in no small part due to Wolf's strong leadership and the excellent example she sets for her crew.

Co-workers speak about her willingness to work shoulder-to-shoulder with

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Courtesy of Larimer County Natural Resources Department

Kym Wolf works on a trail. Wolf recently was awarded the 2008 American Trails National Trail Worker award

the crew and volunteers, never asking anything of them that she isn't willing to do herself.

Wolf shines as an exam-

ple of what can be attained with a lot of hard work, a passion for the land, a sharp McCleod and a perceptive mind.

Meegan Flenniken is the land stewardship program manager for Larimer County Natural Resources. Call her at 679-4562 or send e-mail to flennim@co.larimer.co.us.

Groups need to work together to

I would like to encourage the Board of County Commissioners to retain the public parcels designated 12C at Drake in their entirety.

I know this is a contentious and difficult situation, with emotions running high on all sides of the issue. It's apparent that some landowners in the immediate area feel they are being unfairly stripped of properties they've come to think of as their own, while anglers and the general public feel very much the same.

County administrators are faced with the difficulties of maintaining the properties in financially challenging times.

The truth is these properties belong to all of us — equally — bought and paid for with federal and local taxpayer funds. They are critical, high-value, recreation areas (if they weren't, we wouldn't all be making such a fuss now, would we?) and will become even more critical as our region continues to grow. And make no mistake; we will continue to grow — more so than any of us might imagine.

When I moved here from the southern Catskills with my family in the mid-'70s, it was to escape the crush of urban sprawl that was consuming the quiet places I'd hunted, camped and fished as a kid with my brother and dad. We could literally walk out our back door to hunt rabbits, squirrels and grouse, or cross the two-lane country road in front of our house to fish for bass and pan fish in the creek that ran past our home. We had access to miles of farmland,

creek bottoms and seemingly endless woods.

It was a wonderful life, and I guess we thought it would last forever. It didn't, of course, and now those places exist only in memory. Those that weren't converted to strip malls, schools, supermarkets or subdivisions became estate properties, privatized, posted and shut off to all but a very fortunate few.

Tired of watching it all disappear beneath a carpet of concrete and condos, we sold everything we had, fled to Colorado and bought a little fixer-upper in Campion and lived the country life again. Our kids (4 and 7 years old at the time) grew up trapping muskrats in the ditches, hunting pheasants and doves in the cornfields behind the house, and, eventually, deer and elk on Storm Mountain. We dunked worms in the local ponds for bass and bluegills and fly-fished the Big T for trout. It was like old times again, for a while — but progress inevitably followed.

We used to hunt waterfowl not far from where I now write this e-mail in northwest Loveland. I'm told this area (Ranch Acres) was once covered in vast cherry orchards surrounded by wheat and cornfields that stretched from the foothills all the way to Interstate 25 and beyond. Same goes for where I work — out there at Centerra and the outlet malls. Those fields and woods are

just memories now.

Just up the road, an industrial park and another Super Wal-Mart buried more prime farm land, and the foxes, 'coons and coyotes that roamed there have been forced to raid our bird feeders and eat the neighbors' pets.

Storm Mountain has been privatized such that hunting there without danger of trespassing is a virtual impossibility. You can still fish Simpson Ponds, but the Big Thompson Ponds have been scoured dry by dredger blades and bulldozed into great gray berms of sand and stone. Most of the remaining fishable ponds have been leased to private fishing clubs.

Relentlessly, day by day, month after month, year after year, we continue to lose our wild places and outdoor recreational areas to industrialization, civilization and privatization — so much so that we're now reduced to quibbling amongst ourselves over who has the right to fish — or even walk — within 10 feet of the river bank on a few miniscule parcels of land that border the Big Thompson.

It's all so sad and senseless.

There are now three options on the table, none of which really seems to satisfy everyone, and all of which seem to offend someone.

I believe there's another way to resolve this issue such that all the involved parties benefit. But I also believe it requires everyone working together — instead of against each other.

Dennis Smith
Home Waters



keep recreation areas

er — to bring about a mutually gratifying resolution.

I know from personal experience most folks in the canyon are kind and generous souls at heart, willing to grant anglers passage for the mere courtesy of asking, and who ask nothing in return but respect for their property and privacy. In the 30 years or so that I've fished the canyon, no one has ever refused me permission to fish through their lands. I'm deeply appreciative of their graciousness.

I also know most anglers are polite and considerate individuals with a deep, abiding respect for rivers, wild places and the rights of others.

Sure, there are a few grumpy landowners and some slob fishermen, but we shouldn't make decisions that affect all of us based on the bad behavior of an errant few. Instead, we should capitalize on the good that is in all of us, and work together to help each other and our park administrators resolve this to everyone's mutual satisfaction.

If I understand correctly, the landowners want assurance their adjoining properties will not be trashed by slob fishermen and renegade tourists. They want security, respect and privacy. Anglers merely want access to the river, preferably from both sides, and a place to park their vehicles. The parks department wants maintenance relief. The general public believes public lands should remain in the public trust.

I think all of these ends could easily be satisfied by:

1. Recruiting volunteers from local

angling clubs, youth groups and conservation organizations — Loveland Fishing Club, Trout Unlimited Chapters, Colorado Youth Outdoors, Boy Scout troops, etc. — to assist the parks department with maintenance and general cleanup on the property at 12C.

2. By posting signage with specific language declaring that — "These parcels are Limited Access, Day Use Only, Fishing Properties provided by the Larimer County Department of Parks and Open Lands in partnership and cooperation with the local homeowners, angling clubs and outdoor conservation groups. Littering, loitering, picnicking and partying are strictly prohibited, and violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. These properties are policed, protected and maintained by citizen volunteers for your enjoyment. Behave yourselves; you're being watched." ... Or words to that effect.

This proposal takes no property from anyone, provides security and respect for adjoining landowners, access for anglers and maintenance relief for the parks department. It brings our community closer together and preserves our public lands for future generations.

It looks like win-win-win-win to me. What do you think?

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.

Predator problems

BY MILES BLUMHARDT
For Loveland Connection

When it comes to coyotes, **Charlie Gindler**, rancher and lands specialist with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, straddles the fence — laughing at them at times and shooting at them other times.

Gindler enjoys watching the cunning predators while on his ranch south of Horsetooth Reservoir and on the job at the county's open spaces.

However, like most people, he draws a line in the dirt when they approach him, his wife, his horses or his pets.

A coyote recently mauled his dog in his yard, costing him \$400 in vet bills.

He's also has lost a few cats to coyotes.

Others people in the area have reported at least a dozen cats and dogs missing, presumably at the teeth of coyotes, in the past year or so.

Gindler had a coyote growl at his dog in the back of his pickup.

He's had a coyote chase his cat, nearly going through the cat door on his garage after the cat, only stopping when Gindler yelled at the coyote.

"The coyotes are getting pretty brazen," Gindler said. "I'm pretty much live and let live, and I think they are pretty cool because they are so adaptable. I'd just as soon not kill them, but after the \$400 vet bill, I have a zone around my house that they can't be around or I'll haze them."

Coyote controversy

The controversy on coyotes has heated up in recent months in the Denver area, where coyotes have attacked not

only pets but humans, as well.

Coyotes attacked two people in the Denver area since December.

The suburb of Greenwood Village has reported about 200 coyote sightings in the past year, prompting the suburb to approve a plan to kill coyotes in parks, greenbelts and watersheds.

The DOW does not prohibit municipalities from adopting control measures on coyotes.

The U.S. Agriculture Department's Wildlife Services does use predator control in certain situations to protect agricultural interests, namely for sheep and cattle ranches.

In 2007, the last year for which statistics were available, the agency killed 90,326 coyotes, by far the most of any predator.

The problems with coyotes prompted a recent conference in Denver to discuss possible action to reduce attacks.

Officials with the Larimer County Natural Resources Department, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Rocky Mountain National Park said they have received no reports of attacks on humans and no spike in the number of attacks on pets, though they know coyotes occasionally kill pets.

They added that there are no plans for any control measures other than what are in place.

Most wildlife experts agree that the coyote numbers do appear to be on the rise.

Because coyotes are so prevalent, the DOW does not make population estimates like they do on other predators such as mountain lions or black bears.

"Just the other day, I drove down to the other end of the ranch and in a 1½-mile stretch, I counted seven coyotes. Six of them were standing right on the dirt road," Gindler said. "They're pretty thick."

Who's to blame

Most wildlife experts place the conflict blame on people, not the coyotes.

They say the coyotes are adaptable and are drawn into potential conflict with people who have moved into rural settings or live in the urban-rural interface.

Also, urban and rural parks and open spaces also bring wildlife of all kinds and humans closer together.

Add food sources such as pet food and pets, and you have a recipe for potential encounters.

"Most people just love to see wildlife, no matter the species," said **Rick Spowart**, the DOW wildlife manager for the Estes valley. "They mean well, but they offer food sources, and that often leads to problems."

Gindler, speaking on his own behalf and not representing the county, said he opposes predator control but does believe the coyotes have become bolder and that people should use tactics to make them more afraid of humans.

"Most people who own 35-acre ranchettes don't shoot the animals or don't haze them," Gindler said. "It comes down to do we need to kill them or just make them a little more afraid of humans?"

"I don't like people living in rural settings whining about coyotes, mountain lions and bears. People come out here where predators live, and if they can't handle it, they should go back to the city."

Larry Fredrick, Rocky

WHAT TO KNOW

Here is a look at coyote attacks reported across Colorado in the past five years. None of the attacks was fatal.

- January 2009: Broomfield woman bitten on the arm by a coyote while playing with her dog.
- December 2008: Erie boy snowboarding on golf course bitten on the arm.
- February 2008: Coyote fed by Copper Mountain employees nipped at children snowboarding.
- December 2007: Erie woman bitten by coyote while defending her dog.
- June 2007: Holly woman bitten by coyote while defending her dog.
- Spring 2005: Lakewood woman bitten by coyote while defending her dog.
- Fall 2003: Highlands Ranch woman bitten on the leg at a fast-food restaurant. Wildlife officials later determined the coyote had been fed out of the drive-through window.
- Fall 2003: Colorado Springs boy bitten when he approached a coyote



Courtesy of Ray Rafiti

Coyotes, like this one in pursuit of prey, have caused concerns due to attacks on humans as well as an increase in sightings in urban areas this winter.

he thought was a dog.

Source: Colorado Division of Wildlife

COYOTE PRECAUTIONS

Pets

- Do not allow your pets to roam, especially at night.
- Make sure your yard has a six-foot fence or keep your dog in a completely enclosed kennel.
- Don't allow dogs to run with coyotes.
- Don't leave pet food out or your garbage unsecured. Keep it in a garage

or tightly sealed container.

COYOTE ENCOUNTER

If you see a coyote or it approaches you:

- Keep your distance and do not approach the animal.
- Keep your pets on a leash when walking them.
- If a coyote approaches you or your pet, throw rocks or sticks and use a loud authoritative voice to frighten the animal.

For more information, visit <http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/>.

Mountain National Park spokesman, said despite 3 million people visiting the park annually, the park has few problems with coyotes.

He said the main reason for that is the park's stringent policy that food be properly stored around campgrounds to prevent bears from seeking food near people.

The last reported human attack by a coyote in the park was several years ago when a coyote near Rock Cut along Trail Ridge Road bit a toddler.

The coyote had become

habituated to humans who fed the coyote, which was shot after the attack.

"I've been here eight years and there has been no change in coyote behavior," Frederick said. "Every few years, we have a coyote that gets friendly with campers. We haze it. The next step is to mark it with a paintball gun so we know we are dealing with the same coyote. As a last resort, if overly friendly or aggressive, we have to dispose of it."

Coyotes have survived decades of trapping, poison-

ing, shooting and aerial gunning, but their adaptive nature and productive reproduction has done little to reduce the population, prompting wildlife officials to say the key to managing coyote-human problems is to educate humans.

"Coyotes are smart enough to know that they don't have to chase dog food left out in somebody's yard," said **Chad Morgan**, DOW wildlife manager for the Poudre Canyon. "We're not getting rid of coyotes. People need to be smart and be aware."

fawn hollow

offers chance for quiet exploration

hike above carter lake makes a nice break during the off season

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The waters, beaches and campgrounds of Carter Lake buzz with life all summer long.

But in the winter, on random days when the sun shines, the wind is calm and the lake free from boats, the Fawn Hollow trail remains an excellent option for an outdoor jaunt.

At one-mile long, the hike or mountain bike ride is not too strenuous, even though one is trekking up an incline.

Just don't attempt it on a windy day unless you want to feel as though you are struggling straight up — or as one park worker put it “make sure you pack an anchor.”

Fawn Hollow has two trailheads, one off the side of the road just past Dam No. 1 (the third dam you cross when heading south on County Road 31) and one further south at a parking lot called The Saddle.

Besides the convenience of the parking lot and restrooms at The Saddle, the trail is easier to follow from that side. The path stretches



The scenery on the Fawn Hollow trail is like night and day, Carter Lake to the one side, and dry landscape and rock outcroppings to the other.

one mile from trailhead to trailhead, so if you backtrack it will be two miles.

And from The Saddle, the trail progresses along the edge of Carter Lake, offering a superb view of the water, the landscape and even large peaks in the distance.

Hikers may not encounter many other signs of life in the winter, save the random bunny or bird,

if you go

What: Fawn Lake Trail, a one-mile stretch at Carter Lake, located off County Road 31 just west of Loveland.

How: Enjoy the short trail on foot, mountain bike or horseback. Dogs are allowed if kept on leash.

Cost: \$7 per day or \$65 for an annual parks pass. The annual pass drops to \$35 for seniors 65 and older.

Conditions: Updated information on water levels and fishing and camping conditions are available online at www.co.larimer.co.us/parks/Carter.htm

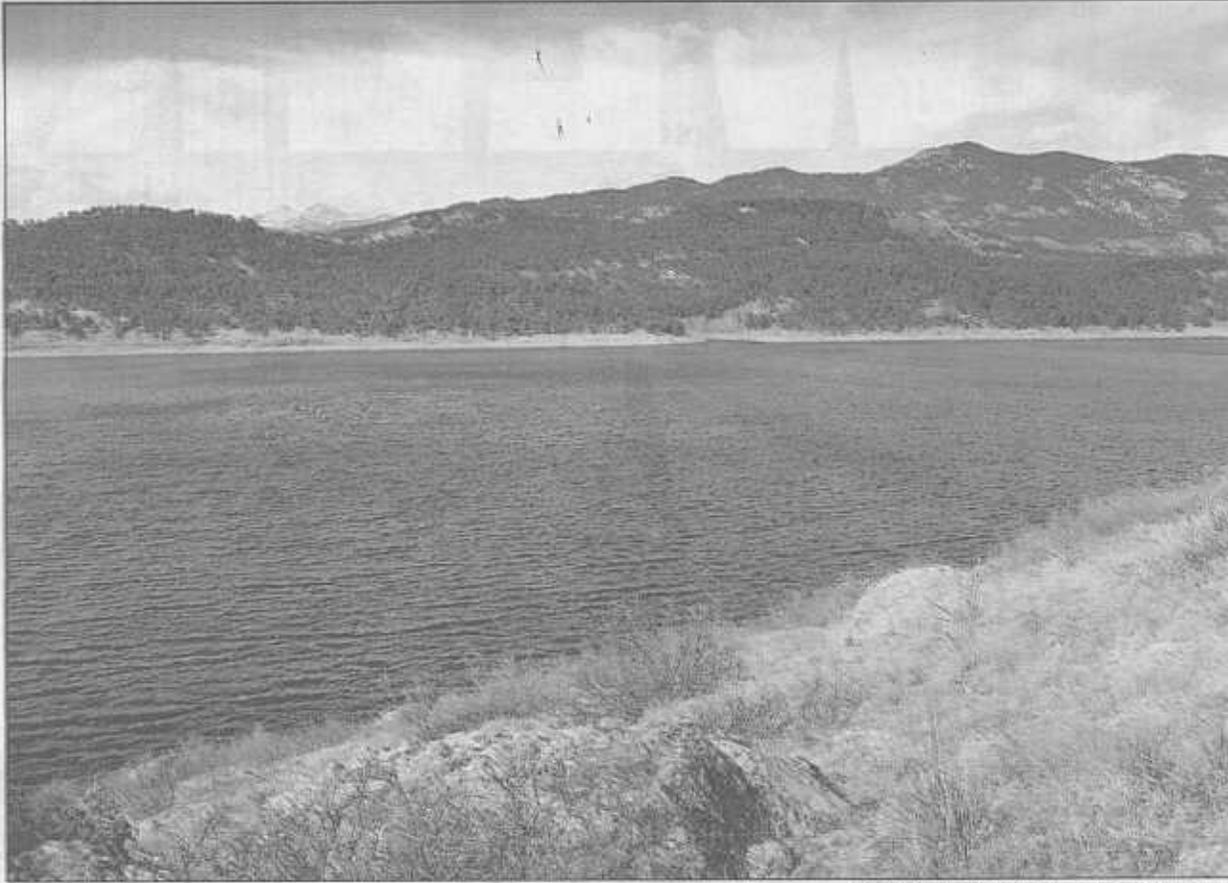
but they could spot a number of different species of wildlife. According to the Larimer County Web site, a bald eagle, elk, bighorn sheep, bobcats and a mountain lion were sighted in the area around the reservoir in recent weeks.

Those in want of a longer hike can pass by Fawn Hollow for the Sundance Trail, three miles along the west side of Carter Lake (six miles round-trip), accessible from the South Shore and North Pines parking lots.

Neither hike is too strenuous; both are ranked easy to moderate, and accessible on foot, mountain bike or horseback.

The hikes are not far from the city, but make one feel as if they are far away from it all.

northern colorado's **news bites**



reporter-herald photos/pamela dickman

The view from the Fawn Hollow trail at Carter Lake is breathtaking year-round, showing off the lake, the surrounding hills and the Rocky Mountains far in the distance.

Camping scarce at RMNP

Bark beetles force closures of sites while hazardous trees are removed

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Campsites at Rocky Mountain National Park are hard to come by in the summer because they all fill up very quickly.

This summer, they will be even more difficult to secure because the park is closing some sites while workers remove hazardous trees killed by the mountain pine beetle epidemic.

"People will have to get here earlier and plan ahead," said Kyle Patterson, spokeswoman for the na-

tional park.

Park officials, she said, cannot predict how many sites will be closed and for how long within each area. This depends on the work and the hazards that crews find, and it will change as they complete jobs in certain areas.

Some of the sites affected include:

Glacier Basin Campground: An undetermined number of the 150 individual campsites will be closed this summer. Therefore, campers

SEE CAMPGROUNDS, PAGE A2



Special to the Reporter-Herald/ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

The landscape is changing at Rocky Mountain National Park as a result of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, causing officials to close campsites while they remove hazards. One loop of Timber Creek campground, pictured, will be open this summer, while the other three loops of sites are closed until beetle-killed trees are removed.

CAMPGROUNDS: Shallow root systems pose danger as trees die

FROM PAGE A1

can no longer make reservations for Glacier Basin; all camping there will be first-come, first-served.

Group camping will not be allowed in this area.

Aspenglen Campground: Campers will be able to reserve the 54 sites in this campground as well as those at Moraine Park. Aspenglen was added to the reservation system to make up for the sites at

Glacier Basin that no longer can be reserved.

Moraine Park: The group camping formerly allowed at Glacier Basin has been moved to Moraine Park, which allows reservations.

Timber Creek Campground: One loop of this campground will be open this summer, but the other three loops of sites will be closed until beetle-killed trees are removed.

The biggest change this summer is the closures in Glacier

Basin, a lodgepole pine forest that borders Glacier Creek.

Park workers have saved some trees there by spraying for the pine beetle, but many other trees have died and need to be removed, Patterson said.

The challenge with lodgepole pine is that, for safety, crews have to remove entire clumps and not just the dead trees.

The root systems are shallow, so these tall, skinny pines rely upon each other to remain standing, Patterson said.

Therefore, to leave a lodgepole pine would even more hazards, she

If all the campsites park are full, employees park visitors center will information on other nearby.

More information is able by calling the park information office at 586-1206.

Pamela Dickman can be reached at 5050, ext. 526, or pdickman@reporterherald.com.

Weld portion of trail finished

BY ASHLEY KEESIS-WOOD

AshleyKeesis

@windsorbeacon.com

WINDSOR — The Weld County portion of the Poudre River Trail is complete.

Well, the concrete, anyway.

"There's still some work to be done on the trail shoulders and things like that, but the actual trail itself is done," Poudre River Trail Manager Ginny Lightsey-Ceehorne said.

The 20-mile trail, which stretches from Island Grove Regional Park in Greeley on the east to the Weld/Larimer county line along the Cache La Poudre River in west Windsor, has been a work in progress for more than a decade.

Greeley, Weld County and the town of Windsor created the Poudre River Trail Corridor Board through an intergovernmental agreement.

This board was then incorporated into Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc. in

About the Poudre River Trail

- > The trail offers non-motorized recreational opportunities including biking, walking, running and inline skating.
- > The trail is open from dawn until dusk year-round.
- > There are few restroom facilities and no water fountains located on the

trail. Portable toilets are available at a few locations but might not be there in winter months.

- > The trail is not maintained during the winter, so travel at your own risk.
- > For more information, visit www.poudretrail.org or call the trail office at 336-4044.

January 1997.

Over the years, the board has been responsible for coordinating construction projects, land acquisitions, fundraising efforts and community education programs about the trail.

"It's pretty exciting news," trail board liaison and town board member Michael Kelly said.

The finished portion of the trail still needs to be connected to the Larimer County trail.

Right now, the Weld

County/Windsor portion of the trail dead-ends at Colorado Highway 392.

Larimer County plans to continue building the trail on the north side of Colorado 392 and follow it along toward Timnath, eventually ending at the CSU Environmental Learning Center off Drake Road in Fort Collins.

To do that, in 2008 Windsor and Larimer County agreed to build a \$1 million to \$1.5 million underpass running



Kyle Schmitz walks his dog, Sophie, along the Poudre River Trail on Thursday. The trail now extends from west of Greeley to Windsor and will be connected with the Larimer County portion of the trail soon.

Carol Hirata
Windsor Beacon

beneath Colorado 392. underpass, with a local Federal funds from the match of \$30,000.

Windsor followed with a \$160,000 budget item in 2009 to pay for the underpass. Transportation have awarded a \$120,000 grant for the design of that

Blaze rages across Bobcat Ridge

Officials believe fire wasn't started by natural causes

BY DOUGLAS CROWL
Loveland Connection

Firefighters from across Northern Colorado responded to a 52-acre fire Tuesday in and around Bobcat Ridge Natural Area, 4 miles west of Masonville.

High winds fanned the flames, but the fire did not grow after crews made their initial push on the blaze.

Officials expected to have the blaze completely contained Thursday, but firefighters would remain at the site for several days. The fire did not threaten any structures and was burned in the natural area, which is owned by the city of Fort Collins, along private property and a small portion of Roosevelt National Forest.

Investigators with the Larimer County Sheriff's Office believe the fire wasn't sparked by natural causes, but they do not

suspect arson.

The incident still was being investigated Thursday.

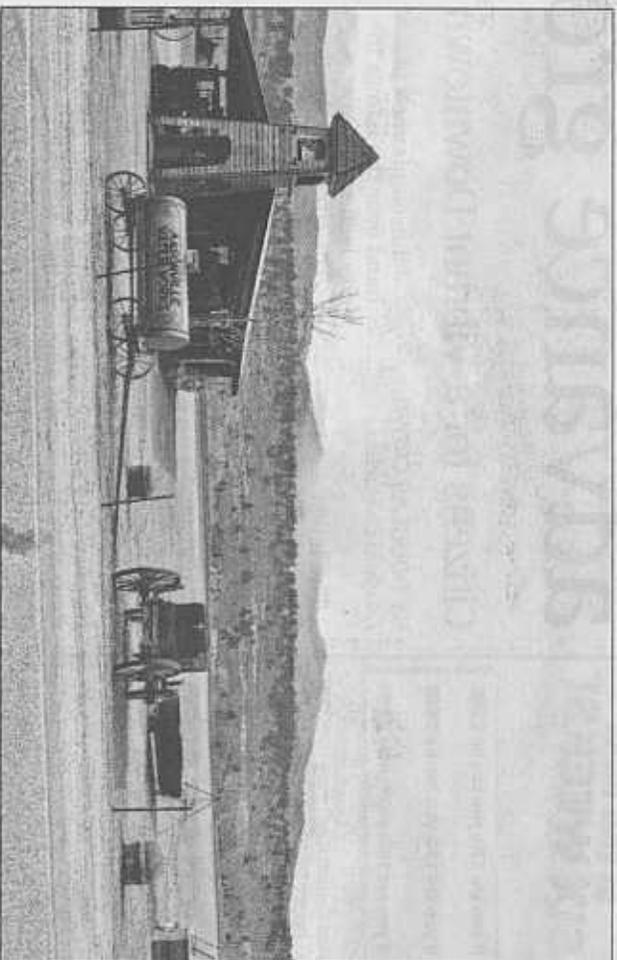
No further details about what caused the fire were released, said Larimer County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman **Eloise Campanella**.

Campanella said there was no lightning in the area, but she couldn't provide further details about why officials believe it was a human-caused fire because it remains under investigation.

Fire crews first estimated the blaze at about 100 acres, but scaled back that estimate to 52 acres after Larimer County officials used a global position system to assess the area, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

Access to the fire proved difficult and it took time for crews to locate the flames and get equipment to the site.

Some firefighters trav-



Smoke from the wildland fire that started Tuesday afternoon west of Loveland and Fort Collins can be seen looking west from Masonville.

Douglas Crowl Loveland Connection

eled through Big Thompson Canyon to access the fire through the Storm Mountain and Cedar Park areas, Larimer County Sheriff's Sgt. **Kevin Johnston** said Tuesday.

Smoke from the blaze was heavy near Masonville on Tuesday afternoon,

while plumes from the fire were visible from the plains.

David Sprague's living room in his Masonville home provided a front-row seat to the billows of smoke rising from fire, but he wasn't too worried about the blaze traveling over the

mountain ridges to his front door.

"This is nothing like when the Bobcat Gulch back," Sprague said.

He recalled in June 2000 watching a wildfire engulf nearly the same area, but setting trees ablaze and

burning the ridge orange with fire. The Bobcat Gulch Fire burned more than 10,000 acres.

"It actually stopped where that one is right now," Sprague said as he pointed to the smoke.

Indeed, a portion of the Bobcat Ridge Fire on Tuesday was burning in the Bobcat Gulch Fire area, U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman **Reghan Cloutman** said.

Cloutman said, in general, there's likely less fuel in the previously burned area, though the grasses now there are considered "flashy fuels" and spark easily and burn quickly.

At least 40 firefighters worked on the blaze Tuesday from the U.S. Forest Service, Larimer County Emergency Services, Loveland Fire, Poudre Fire Authority, Colorado State Forest Service and Berthoud Fire.

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