

Road, trail projects get boost from stimulus funds

By Cherry Sokolowski
North Forty News

Some of the federal stimulus money for road and trail projects is heading to northern Colorado.

This summer and fall, work will begin on several projects: a bike trail underpass on the Poudre River Regional Trail near Windsor, resurfacing of County Road 17 (Shields Street) south of Fort Collins, and a few projects in Weld County.

About \$6.5 million in stimulus funds has been allocated to northern Colorado for roads and trails. "These projects will create jobs and get money into the economy right away," said Larimer County Public Works Director Marc Engemoen.

The bike trail underpass, a joint project of Larimer County and Windsor, has been allocated \$600,000 in stimulus money. It will be built under State Highway 392 near Windsor. The underpass is "a key component" of the Poudre River Regional Trail, according to Jeffrey Borring of the county's Natural Resources Department. More than

30 miles of the trail system is already completed, and when finished, the trail will stretch from Greeley to Bellvue.

At present, there's an 8-mile gap in the trail, between Windsor and the Environmental Learning Center east of Fort Collins. After the underpass is built, Larimer County plans to begin work on the trail segment through the River Bluffs Open Space, just west of Windsor. A \$500,000 grant from Great Outdoors Colorado will pay for that work, as well as a parking lot and trailhead. The county plans to build that section of trail in the fall of 2010.

A pair of bald eagles is nesting near the River Bluffs Open Space, according to Boring. Construction work on the underpass will be delayed until this fall in order not to disturb the birds.

Another project to be funded with stimulus funds is resurfacing of County Road 17, beginning at the south end of Fort Collins and continuing south to Berthoud. This road is called Shields Street in Fort Collins and Taft Avenue in Loveland. A joint project by Larimer County, Loveland and Berthoud, the roadwork will be funded with \$3.5 million in federal funds.

In Weld County, the county road department as well as the towns of Evans and Severance will also receive funds for projects.



Family outing. Wil Stuthheit, 81, and daughter Lynn Stuthheit, both of Fort Collins, enjoy a spring day on the Poudre River Regional Trail east of LaPorte. The trail recently got a nice boost from federal stimulus funds, which will pay for an expensive underpass near Windsor. When completed, the trail will run from Bellvue to Greeley.
Photo by Cherry Sokolowski

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Readers' Rendezvous

Guest Commentary

League touts open space and community separators

By Georgia Locker
Leader of the
Sustainability Committee

The Larimer County League of Women Voters heartily endorses efforts to secure and maintain open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat and community separators in northern Colorado. The league believes it is important to protect scenic vistas and open space, maintain community individuality and preserve agricultural lands.

The league hosted a public forum on community separators last November with a panel of representatives from the cities of Berthoud, Fort Collins, Johnstown, Loveland, Timnath, Wellington, Windsor, as well as Larimer County. There was agreement that keeping a sense of community uniqueness was important, though each had very different levels of resources to accomplish this.

Securing and maintaining open space and community separators has incredible benefits. They include the following:

1. Providing significant economic benefit.
2. Ensuring a high quality of life for us to enjoy.
3. Assisting in maintaining a sense of community.

Many businesses and entrepreneurs have located here due

to the high quality of life, in large part due to our natural areas, open spaces and recreation. They are a potent weapon when competing for companies, entrepreneurs and a highly educated workforce. Many companies, for example AMD, Woodward Governor and Intel, have publicly stated they are here because of the high quality of life.

Though we are not immune to nationally driven economic problems, our unemployment rate is lower than much of the rest of the country and the state, and real estate prices are more stable. In Fort Collins, open space, natural areas, trails and recreation areas have been a key factor in the city being awarded the best place to live, to have a business, to work, to retire, to bicycle, best place to invest in real estate. (Check <http://fcgov.com/business/demographics>.)

Keeping our communities from growing together helps foster a sense of community,

protects the unique qualities of each city and keeps us from becoming another sprawling megalopolis.

Agriculture is still an important part of our economy and heritage in northern Colorado, and open space and community separators have played a part in maintaining our agricultural heritage. Cities or counties can work with landowners to initiate conservation easements allowing land to be preserved, while being farmed. This is extremely cost effective for both parties and creates an opportunity for buffers between communities and views to be protected.

The next time you see some of the 50 bald eagles wintering at Fossil Creek Reservoir, hike at Devil's Backbone or Coyote Ridge, or see the beautiful mountain views, thank those community visionaries who

helped preserve what makes this area so special. Encourage your community to do more: Open space, trails, natural areas, recreation areas and agricultural lands are critical for our economy, our sense of community, our spirits and our future.



The North Forty News welcomes letters to the editor (250 words maximum). Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number for verification of authorship. Send your thoughts to North Forty News, 3101 Kintzley Court, Unit J, LaPorte CO 80535 or info@northfortynews.com.

County open lands manager will leave lasting legacy

Larimer County Open Lands Manager K-Lynn Cameron says it's time to catch her breath, reflect and consider the next challenge. She will be leaving her Larimer County job in mid-June.

Cameron began work at the county in 1981 as a parks planner. Except for a half-year hiatus working for Fort Collins in 1995, she has been with Larimer County ever since.

"It's time for me to turn the reins over to others while I pursue new challenges," she said.

Cameron leaves a lasting legacy for Larimer County. In 1981 she began developing a strategy to fund open space protection, and she developed

the county's first Parks Master Plan in the early 1990s. That plan gave rise to a grassroots initiative to establish funding to protect the special places of Larimer County. In 1995, citizens voted overwhelmingly for the quarter-cent sales tax initiative Help Preserve Open Spaces to fund protection of open space, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and regional parks and trails. Citizens renewed the tax in 1999.

Because land acquisition requires "willing landowners," Cameron has worked personally with most of the landowners to create the necessary partnerships.

"One of my favorite parts of

the job has been meeting landowners and recognizing their appreciation for their land," she said. "We take a walk, they point things out and they tell me their land is the most beautiful land in Larimer County. When I see it through their eyes, I can't help but agree."

Among the memorable projects she collaborated on with other local, state and nonprofit groups is the Laramie Foot-hills Mountains to Plains Project, which has protected more than 55,000 acres in northern Larimer County. The project includes Red Mountain Open Space, the Roberts Ranch conservation easements and the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.



Another milestone. K-Lynn Cameron, who will soon leave her job as open lands manager, takes a rest at Hermit Park Open Space near Loveland.

Photo courtesy of Larimer County

Many miles from foothills to plains ready for visitors

By JoAn Bjarko
North Forty News

The human experience with the rugged, wild and far-reaching landscape of northern Colorado changes once again on June 6.

Instead of Paleo-Indians hunting huge bison, or homesteaders scraping out a living, the hills and valleys will be the new playground of equestrians, mountain bike riders, geology buffs and

people who just like to hike through a pristine environment.

Opening with fanfare to the public on June 6 and 7 are Larimer County's Red Mountain Open Space and Fort Collins' Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, both hugging the Wyoming border. These 50 square miles were purchased with grants and voter-approved sales tax dollars. In recognition of everyone's role in financing the projects, there will be no fees charged to visit these adjacent open spaces. Together, the sites have more than 50 miles of trails.

Red Mountain and Soapstone are part of the region known as the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project, a connection of lands owned by ranchers, farmers, state and local governments. Together they provide unhampered wildlife corridors and tracts of land large enough to support rare species of plants and animals, including the swift fox and ferruginous hawk.

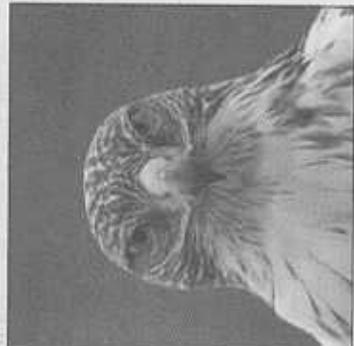
"Everything an animal could

want or need is provided," said Rob Novak, educational program coordinator for Larimer County.

One might say the stars aligned to bring these pieces together. The large ranches that once made up Red Mountain and Soapstone came on the market at the same time Great Outdoor Colorado had allocated large sums of grant money for landscape-scale preservation projects. A joint proposal from Larimer County and Fort Collins qualified for funding.

"We had no idea how awesome the cultural and natural resources are until we got in there," said the county's open lands manager, K-Lynn Cameron.

Festivities on Saturday run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at both locations. Visitors can take in fun activity booths and orientation talks. Red Mountain will offer mountain bike tours and wildflower hikes. The Ram Na-



Room for the wild. Ferruginous hawks are one of the many wildlife species making their home in Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Spectacular view. Wide open spaces are waiting for the public on June 6 and 7 when Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area officially open. Above is a view looking south from the rim of the Big Hole in Wyoming into RMOS.

Photo by Charlie Johnson

tion Drummers will perform at 12:30 p.m. Saturday at the Soapstone Prairie north trailhead.

On Sunday, grand opening ceremonies start at 11:30 a.m. simultaneously at the Red Mountain trailhead and the Soapstone Prairie north trail-

After June 6, Soapstone and Red Mountain will be open from dawn to dusk, March through November. No dogs are allowed. The open spaces will be closed December through February because the lands are critical winter range for pronghorn, deer and elk.

To reach Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, travel north on County Road 15, continuing north when it becomes Rawhide Flats Road, which leads to the south entrance station, the location to park horse trailers. Cars can continue on to the north entrance, which is the location of the Lindenmeier Overlook and many of the events.

To reach Red Mountain Open Space, travel north on CR 15, turn west on CR 78, turn north on CR 17, turn west on CR 80, turn north on CR 19, turn west on CR 21 and continue about seven miles. CR 21 becomes Antelope Valley Road, which ends at the trailhead.

At this time, neither location allows backcountry camping.

Get out and enjoy the trails from dawn to dusk, but go prepared with water, food and map. It's rugged out there.

Open lands advocate considers sustainable future

By JoAn Bjarko
North Forty News

Thirteen years and 43,578 acres preserved in Larimer County. Dollars collected for the county and its eight municipalities: \$105 million and counting.

When K-Lynn Cameron leaves her job as the first open lands manager in mid-June, she will still be thinking about what the future holds for these beloved lands and the tax-supported conservation program that protects them.

The 0.25 percent voter-approved sales tax that funds these efforts will expire in 2018, but Cameron believes the time to start reevaluating the open lands program is now.

"With the economy down, it's time to catch our breath and talk to the community," she said in a recent interview.

It's rugged out there.

Partnerships with the county's residents, a vision that promotes "healthy land, healthy people and healthy communities."

"Open lands has had phenomenal success since 1996," she said. "To continue, we need to make some changes to adapt to the changing world... What does the next generation of open space sales tax look like to be successful — to reach out to all levels of the community?"

Voters approved the county's first open lands sales tax in November 1995 and renewed it in 1999 with the ability for the program to borrow money to purchase special lands more immediately. Incoming taxes are now paying off that debt, as well as paying for land management.

This has resulted in protection of larger ecosystems by buying land outright or by purchasing conservation easements that preclude development. In some cases, the county is a financial partner with other groups such



Looking ahead. K-Lynn Cameron will leave the post of open lands manager this month, but she plans to remain involved in thinking about the future.

Photo by JoAn Bjarko

as Fort Collins, The Nature Conservancy or Legacy Land Trust. Two of the larger acquisitions in northern Larimer County are Red Mountain Open Space (opening

June 6, see page 12) and Eagle's Nest Open Space.

About 58 percent of the sales tax goes back to the incorporated communities in Larimer County. Wellington, for example, has received about \$880,000 and Fort Collins has received nearly \$40 million from the countywide tax. This formula for sharing means small communities don't have to ask their residents to pass separate tax issues to protect open space, a matter that could be a critical part of the tax renewal request, Cameron said.

Partnerships with other non-profit agencies working on health and social issues should also be considered, she suggested. "We need to broaden our minds to be more accessible to low-income people, to get a wider audience," she said.

She noted that there is no fee to visit the protected lands designated for public use, but many people don't have the ability to get there.

"Are we protecting land and connecting with people from all parts of the community?" she asked. That would be another topic for discussion.

Here are a few other concepts on the discussion list: Can open spaces be used to grow healthy food? Can schools and children's programs become more involved? Are there additional ways open spaces can enhance economic vitality?

As the discussion gets going, county residents might find themselves being asked to complete a survey, members of volunteer boards will be given a chance to weigh in with their opinions, and people living in the incorporated communities will want to consider how their local governments are spending the open space tax dollars.

"My heart is still with the open lands program, but to be sustainable we have to look at it in a different way," Cameron said.

Grand+Opening



The view, looking south, from Wyoming into Colorado on the top of Cheyenne Rim Trail. Larimer County Parks and Open Spaces will be having a grand opening of Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area on Saturday and Sunday. Reporter-Herald photos/GABRIEL CHRISTUS

County's largest piece of public land opens to public Saturday

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The bright sun emphasized the vibrant green grasses and eye-catching red rocks that seemed to stretch for miles on a recent morning.

"It changes hour to hour, the shadows and the hues," Joel Wykoff said of Red Mountain Open Space — Larimer County's largest open space set to open Saturday alongside Fort Collins' largest open space.

"It's a wonderful piece of property," Wykoff would know.

He has spent the past 20 months heading a crew that cleaned up and built eight miles of trails on Red Mountain Open Space, which borders Wyoming.

The neighboring Soapstone Prairie, more rolling fields and hills, has 28 miles of trail, some of which connect to Red Mountain's trails.

The new open spaces are part of a larger partnership.

The city of Fort Collins and Larimer County worked with Legacy Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and Great Outdoors Colorado to save more than 55,000 acres from future development.

The Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project protects a diverse habitat that stretches from Interstate 25 to the foothills and north Larimer County to Wyoming. Much of that still is being

SEE OPEN, PAGE A2



Trails and Open Land Projects Supervisor Joel Wykoff, left, talks with John Bender, a trail crew worker, at the top of Cheyenne Rim Trail in Red Mountain Open Space on Thursday.

If You Go

Residents are welcome to explore Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Open Space all day Saturday and Sunday during their grand openings.

Both open spaces will have activity booths, mountain bike tours and guided walks throughout the weekend.

The open space staff reminds visitors to bring plenty of water and food because both locations are remote, 25 miles north of Fort Collins.

Highlights include:
• 11:30 a.m. Sunday — Official grand open-

ing ceremonies held at both open spaces simultaneously.

• 9 a.m., Saturday — Guided wildflower walk begins at Red Mountain Open Space (2.3 miles, rated easy)

• 12:30 p.m. Saturday — Ram Nation Drummers, north trailhead at Soapstone Prairie

More information on the open spaces and grand opening events, scheduled throughout June, is available online at:

- www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone
- www.larimer.org

OPEN: Soapstone Prairie has quarter-mile paved trail

FROM PAGE A1

farmed and ranched and is not open to the public.

But a portion of it, the 15,000-acre Red Mountain Open Space and the 20,000-acre Soapstone Prairie, will open this weekend.

Residents will be able to explore the trails and enjoy the rolling meadows, arroyos, vistas and a canyon dubbed "The Big Hole."

They also can celebrate the history of human interaction on the property, dating back 12,000 years and including American Indian cultures and settlers.

Soapstone Prairie includes the renowned Lindenmeier archaeological site, excavated in the 1930s, as well as stone rings and other examples of history. A quarter-mile paved trail, which is handicapped-accessible, leads to an overlook of the site.

Both open spaces are

Good to know

• Dogs are not allowed on either Red Mountain or Soapstone Prairie open spaces because of the sensitive habitats and wildlife populations.

• For the same reasons, the open spaces will close for three months every winter, December to February.

• The rest of the year, Red Mountain and Soapstone Prairie will be

open daily from dusk till dawn.

• Trails join the two open spaces.

• The Cheyenne Rim Trail on Red Mountain Open Space allows people to hike or mountain bike into Wyoming, onto the Big Hole Open Space owned by the city of Cheyenne.

• Horses are allowed at both open spaces.

rich with history.

If modern-day explorers should see physical signs of the past (tools, Folsom points or other artifacts), they should leave them be, according to K-Lynn Cameron, Larimer County's open lands director.

Cameron, who has built Larimer County's open space program from scratch, will leave her job a week after the grand opening.

She believes that those who follow her will continue that legacy and fill in gaps in the Laramie Foothills Moun-

tains to Plains Project.

And with road work and last-minute details being completed this week — and all the rain of recent weeks — Cameron expects some bright greens for the grand openings.

"It's beautiful in any color," she said. "But it's not often you get to see it like this."

COMING UP: Check out the Outpost section in Thursday's Reporter-Herald for more details on the trails, scenery and upcoming guided hikes at Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

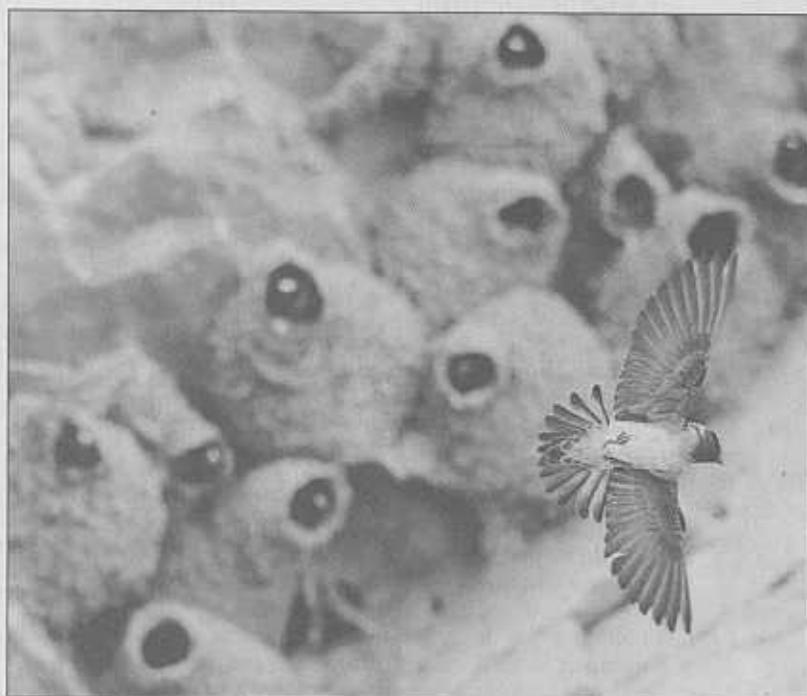


Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

Visitors take a sneak peak Thursday at the Red Mountain Open Space walk over Sand Creek as they hike the Bent Rock Trail in northern Larimer County. The area opens Saturday to the public.

Wild, Wild West

27,000 acres of trails, views, vistas open this weekend



Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

A swallow flies past mud nests along the Bent Rock Trail in Sand Creek Canyon of Red Mountain Open Space.

BY MILES BLUMHARDT

milesblumhardt@coloradoan.com

A lofty idea that has ebbed and flowed for the past 30 years will finally come to fruition Saturday when more than 27,000 acres of public land will be officially opened to the public.

Saturday and Sunday will mark the grand opening celebration of the 8,000-acre Red Mountain Open Space and 19,000-acre Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. The properties, managed by the Larimer County Natural Resources Department and city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, respectively, will include 50 miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding as well as valued cultural sites and views and vistas from stunning redrock mountains to grassy plains that conjure up images of the Old West.

"I'm glad that my kids will be able to come up here and run and mountain bike



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See WILD/Page C3

Wild

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and enjoy the vistas," said John Bender, a trail crew member with Larimer County Parks and Open Lands who worked on the trails at Red Mountain. "But I'm really glad that we will be preserving a natural and cultural history of the Front Range."

The conjoined properties have been somewhat controversial because of their location much closer to the Wyoming border than Fort Collins. Also, the entire 55,400-acre Laramie Foothills Project, of which Red Mountain and Soapstone are a part will cost \$30 million. More than \$12 million of that came from Great Outdoors Colorado lottery funding.

K-Lynn Cameron, Larimer County open lands director who has spent many years working on the Laramie Foothills Project, said it's that remoteness that will draw people to the area 30 miles north of Fort Collins.

"On the drive up here, you feel like you're leaving the city behind," said Cameron, who recently resigned her



Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

Bird Van Doren, left and others take a sneak peak Thursday at Red Mountain Open Space as they hike Bent Rock Trail in northern Larimer County.

position. "By the time you get up here, you're ready to get out on the trail and feel this incredible western landscape."

That landscape includes the Lindenmeier site on the Soapstone property and the Big Hole on the Red Mountain Property. The Lindenmeier site is a desig-

nated National Historic Landmark. Excavations there have uncovered bones and human artifacts from 10,000-11,000 B.C.

The Big Hole is a geographical phenomenon where exposed striated redrock cliffs unveil millions of years of geology.

The parcels also offer

excellent wildlife and wildflower viewing and beauty that begs artists and photographers to try and capture their likeness.

"Putting trails in here enables people to come up and see the beauty," Bender said. "When people have a better understanding of a place, it helps save the place."

Grand opening

Saturday

- > Activity booths, time capsule art project and orientation talks every 30 minutes, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- > Overland Mountain Biking Club bike tours, 10 a.m. from Red Mountain trailhead
- > Naturalist-led wildflower walk, 9 a.m. from Red Mountain trailhead
- > Flint knapping demonstration, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Soapstone Prairie Lindenmeier Overlook
- > Ram Nation Drummers, 12:30 pm at Soapstone Prairie north trailhead

Sunday

- > Opening Ceremony, 11:30 a.m. simultaneously at Red Mountain trailhead and Soapstone Prairie north trailhead
- > Activity booths, time capsule art project and orientation talks every 30 minutes, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- > Information:
www.fcgov.com/naturalareas and www.larimer.org/redmountain

Red Mountain Open Space

> **Directions:** Take Colorado Highway 1 (Terry Lake Road) to Larimer County Road 15 (Waverly turnoff). Go left on County Road 15 to County Road 78. Go left on County Road 78 to County Road 17. Go right on County Road 17 to County Road 80. Go left on County Road 80 to County Road 19. Go right on County Road 19 to County Road 21. Go left on County Road 21 for about seven miles to the trailhead parking area.

> **Hours:** Dawn to dusk March-November

> **Acres:** 15,000; 8,000 open to the public

> **Pets:** Not allowed

> **Information:**
www.larimer.org/naturalresources/laramie_foothills.htm

Trails

All trails open to hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding unless otherwise indicated:

- > **Bent Rock Trail:** 2.3 miles, easy, hiking only
- > **Sinking Sun Trail:** 1.2 miles, easy
- > **Big Hole Wash Trail:** 2.8 miles, easy, connects to Soapstone Natural Area
- > **Ruby Wash Trail:** 2.5 miles, easy
- > **Cheyenne Rim Trail:** 3.6 miles, moderate to difficult, connects to Soapstone Natural Area



A pronghorn antelope pauses in a clearing Saturday at Red Mountain Open Space in northern Larimer County.

Rich Abrahamson
The Coloradan

Soapstone Natural Area

> **Directions:** Take Hwy 1/ Terry Lake Road to County Road 15 north, turn north onto Rawhide Flats Road and continue north to the entrance station.

> **Hours:** Dawn to dusk, March-November

> **Acres:** 19,000

> **Pets:** Not allowed, even in vehicles

> **Information:**
www.fcgov.com/naturalareas

Trails

South trailhead

These trails are open to horseback riding, cycling and hiking. All trailheads have a picnic shelter, vault toilet, information kiosk and parking.

> **Cheyenne Rim Trail:** 11.7 miles with connection to Canyon Trail and Red Mountain Open Space.

> **Pronghorn Loop:** 7.5 mile loop with connection to Plover Trail and Sand Wash Trail

> **Plover Trail:** 7 miles, closed April 1- July 15 for grassland birds, connects to Pronghorn Loop and Sandwash Trail

North trailhead

These trails open to cycling and hiking, unless where noted. Horses are not allowed.

> **Lindenmeier Overlook:** 1/4 mile paved trail to pavilion with interpretive signs and seating

> **Mahogany Trail:** 5 mile trail with connection to Canyon Trail and Pronghorn Loop

> **Towhee Trail:** 3-mile loop for hiking only with connection to Mahogany Trail and Canyon Trail

> **Canyon Trail:** 5 mile trail on north edge of property with connection to Plover Trail and Red Mountain Open Space

> **Sand Wash Trail:** 1.5 miles con-

nects Canyon Trail and Pronghorn Loop

Caution

> There is no water available at the Red Mountain Open Space trailhead for people or livestock.

> These areas are remote. Weather conditions can change quickly. The threat of afternoon thunderstorms occurs daily. Plan your outing accordingly.

> Rattlesnakes inhabit the area.

> No going off trail.

Red Mountain events

All programs are free. Registration required. Information: Rob, (970) 679-4561 or visit www.larimer.org/naturalresources/registration/

> **Monday:** 8 a.m. Plein Air the Plains. Painting class. Light hiking required.

> **June 12:** 8:30 a.m. Life on the Edge easy hiking trip to learn the variety of life found here.

> **June 13 and 20:** 10:30 a.m. Hiking with your toddler. Learn strategies how to help your toddler enjoy the outdoors.

> **June 14 and 21:** 10 a.m. Home on the Range hike. Naturalist talks about abut life on the ranch.

> **June 16 and 30:** 9 a.m. Laramie Foothills archeology hike with Jason LaBelle.

> **June 23:** 5 p.m. Intermediate SLR photography clinic. Easy to moderate hike during which professional photographer Charlie Johnson gives tips on how to make good images.

> **June 27:** 8 a.m. Moderate horseback ride of 8 miles.

Soapstone Prairie events

All programs are free. Registration required. Information: Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, 416-2815

or send e-mail to naturalareas@fcgov.com

> **June 8:** 9 a.m. Easy wildflower walk Free.

> **June 8:** 8:30 a.m. Horseback riding. Bring your own horse.

> **June 10:** 9 a.m. On-site discussion of the Lindenmeier site led by CSU professor Jason LaBelle.

> **June 11:** 9 a.m. Moderate hike of 5 to 7 miles to explore the prairie and old homesteads.

> **June 12:** 8 a.m. Easy 1-mile birds and migration hike.

> **June 13:** 9 a.m., Moderate 3-mile loop hike of the Towhee Trail

> **June 16: 9 a.m. Drawing and painting day.** Bring your art supplies and join a naturalist artist who will share secrets.

> **June 16:** 8 a.m. Nature photography day. Bring your camera and joint a naturalist artist who will share secrets.

> **June 17:** 9 a.m. Birds and climate change. Easy 1-mile hike.

> **June 18:** 9 a.m. Wildflower walk. Easy 2-mile hike.

> **June 20:** 9 a.m. Walking the Gangplank. Moderate 5- to 7-mile geology hike.

> **June 20:** 8 a.m. Equestrian ride. Bring your own horse.

> **June 21:** 8:30 a.m. Equestrian ride. Bring your own horse.

> **June 22:** 9 a.m. Wildflower walk. Easy 2-mile hike.

> **June 23:** 9 a.m. On-site at discussion of Lindenmeier site led by CSU professor Jason LaBelle.

> **June 25:** 9 a.m. Moderate 5-mile loop hike of the Towhee and Canyon trails.

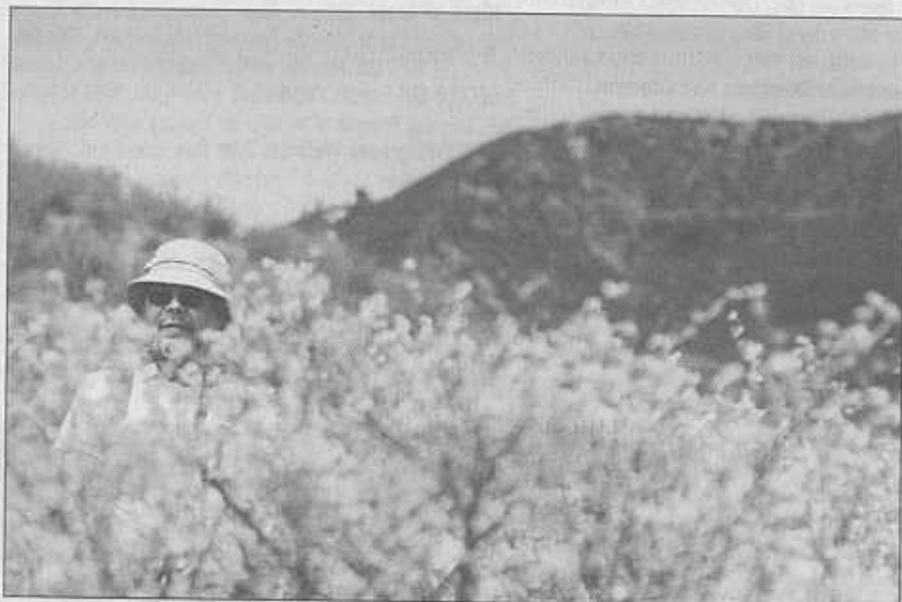
> **June 27:** 1 p.m. 24-hour blitz to see how many species can be identified with the help of scientists.

> **June 30:** 9 a.m. Bike to the Big Hole. Moderate 15-mile round-trip ride.



Joel Wykoff, trails and open land projects supervisor, stands in the Red Mountain Open Space at the bottom of Cheyenne Rim Trail May 28.

Reporter-Herald photos/
GABRIEL CHRISTUS



Revealing new open space

Red Mountain, Soapstone will welcome public this weekend

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Stand on the edge of The Big Hole, inhale the smell of sage, and enjoy two vastly different views.

To the north is Wyoming, and fields of tan, rolling plains.

To the south is Colorado, and the 1,000-foot-deep canyon dubbed The Big Hole.

Purple irises, red rocks, arroyos, stands of mountain mahogany and vistas decorate the bright green landscape, which is beautiful enough to inspire paintings or poetry.

"It's so perfect," said Larimer County land agent Charlie Johnson, taking in the view of Red Mountain Open Space, which will open to the public Saturday.

"I think about Indians coming here, people from Europe

Did you know

Soapstone Prairie is home to several archaeological sites, including the Lindenmeier site, excavated by the Smithsonian Institute in the 1930s. There, experts found artifacts from the Folsom culture including the unique fluted point called the Folsom Point.

A short, paved trail (handicapped-accessible) leads to a spot to look down on the Lindenmeier site.

coming here for the first time."

The brand-new open space is culturally rich, home to people as long as 12,000 years ago.

This weekend, it opens to the public for the first time in decades with newly cut trails and rich habitat to explore.

For American Indians, visiting the land has special meaning, said K-Lynn Cameron, the county's open lands director.

"They haven't been able to step foot on their ancient homeland, and now they



An old truck slowly rusts away in an abandoned alabaster mine in the Red Mountain Open Space.

can," she said.

The grand opening of the Larimer County open space will be held simultaneously with the opening of Fort Collins' newest natural area, Soapstone Prairie.

The two parcels of land, together 35,000 acres (some of which is not open to the public) are adjacent, protected by a partnership with the city, county, Great Outdoors Colorado, Legacy Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy.

Between the two, crews built 28 miles of new trail, some that connect the spaces — opening Saturday on National Trails Day.

More trails will be cut in the coming year.

SEE OPEN SPACE, PAGE B4

OPEN SPACE: A network of trails opens Saturday in Red Mountain and Soapstone Prairie

FROM PAGE B1

The Cheyenne Rim Trail (the only one not rated easy) leads to the top of The Big Hole and into Big Hole Open Space in Wyoming.

The first stretch of the hike — up — is more challenging, but the workout is worth it for hikers and mountain bikers. The scenery changes throughout the trek, and the vistas from the top are breathtaking.

The return stretch — down — is easier, and although you can retrace the same path, or take an alternate route that connects with other trails, the views seem different.

Hikers can set their own limitations as far as difficulty of trail and how far to go.

Maps, available at the trailhead, show how the different trails connect and

If you go

What: Red Mountain and Soapstone Prairie open spaces open to the public Saturday and Sunday.

When: Dusk to dawn, seven days a week, through November. The open spaces will close December through February to protect wildlife species and habitat.

Facilities: Bathrooms and picnic shelters at both main trailheads.

Trails: There are 28 miles of trails that connect to each

other and connect the open spaces.

What is allowed: Trails accommodate hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders. Dogs are not allowed.

 **ON THE NET:** For directions, regulations and trail maps: www.co.larimer.co.us/naturalresources/red_mountain.cfm; www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone.

loop back to the trailhead.

Red Mountain and Soapstone Prairie open spaces are 25 miles north of Fort Collins.

Visitors truly are out of the city, which means they should bring plenty of food and water.

The two open spaces are part of a much larger effort to protect land, called the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project.

Most of those protected acres, however, are privately

ranch and not open to the public.

Red Mountain and Soapstone Prairie are indicative of the diverse habitats, as the name says, from mountains

to plains.

Wildlife that thrives on the land ranges from eagles and elk to bears and big cats.

"It's just teeming with all kinds of life," Cameron said.

The views are beautiful all seasons and times of day, according to the state. Johnson has spent the past two years preparing the space to be open.

A week before the opening, Johnson stood at the top of The Big Hole and looked down, appreciating the vast landscape.

"You should see it when the sun is setting," he said. "That is spectacular."

Pamela Dickman can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 526, or pdickman@reporter-herald.com.

Rains delay Red Mountain opening

Larimer County to share ceremony with Fort Collins

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Recent rains have postponed the opening of Red Mountain Open Space, planned for this weekend.

"It's been raining up there almost all week, and it delayed the construction crews," said Kerri Rollins, fund development and outreach specialist with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

"There's a short section of road that didn't get finished — 3,000 feet actually."

However, the adjacent Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, owned by the city of Fort Collins, will still open to the public today.

Larimer County and Fort Collins officials, who worked to open the respective natural areas 25 miles north of Fort Collins, will gather at Soapstone Prairie at 11:30 a.m. Sunday to dedicate the protected acres.

They had planned separate, simultaneous dedications at both sites.

"We're grateful Fort Collins has allowed us to join their (celebration)," said Rollins.

Organizers with the city and county encourage residents to come to the dedication and celebrate both natural areas.

The two areas were developed together as part of a larger partnership of Fort Collins, Larimer County, the Legacy Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy and Great Outdoors Colorado.

The Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains project protects about 55,000 acres from development, stretching from Interstate 25 to the mountains and extending north to Wyoming.

Most of the property is privately owned and not open to the public.

The Larimer County open space and Fort Collins natural area are the pieces that will be open to the public, with 28 miles of trails between the two.

Soapstone will open its gates, and depending on the weather, its trails, today.

Educational events and

Grand Openings

Weather has delayed the grand opening of Larimer County's new Red Mountain Open Space, located 25 miles north of Fort Collins.

The adjacent Soapstone Prairie, a city of Fort Collins natural area, will open today and have a dedication Sunday. Larimer County officials will join city officials at Soapstone Prairie on Sunday and dedicate Red Mountain Open Space even though it has not yet opened to the public.

Here's what you need to know:

Soapstone Prairie:

- Educational events planned throughout the weekend.
- Dedication of both natural areas at 11:30 a.m. Sunday at the Lindenmeier Overlook, a quarter-mile hike on a paved trail.
- Dogs are not allowed.
- To get there: From north Fort Collins, take Colorado 1 (Terry Lake Road) north and continue north on County Road 15 when Highway 1 veers east. Stay on County Road 15, which becomes Rawhide Flats Road, for about 13 miles until you reach the parking lot.
- Check www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone for updates on last-minute weather closures.

Red Mountain:

- Open space will not open this weekend but will be dedicated at 11:30 a.m. Sunday at Soapstone Prairie.
- Could open June 14.
- Check www.co.larimer.co.us/redmountain for updates.

booths are still planned all day unless the weather is too bad. Updated information will be posted on the city's Web site, www.fcgov.com/naturalareas, by 7 a.m.

Events planned for today at Red Mountain Open Space are canceled, but officials hope the roads will be finished by June 13, allowing other events to occur as planned throughout the month.

 **ON THE NET:** Updated information on the opening date and upcoming events is available online at www.larimer.org/redmountain.

SOAPSTONE AND RED MOUNTAIN DEDICATION

Event highlights new outdoor areas



Michael G. Semans/The Coloradoan

Fort Collins Mayor Doug Hutchinson speaks Sunday during the dedication ceremony for Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space.

Plaque at Lindenmeier honors councilman, wife

BY MOLLY ARMBRISTER
MollyArmbrister
@coloradoan.com

Spectators at Sunday's dedication ceremony for Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space challenged Mother Nature.

First a parade of buses and vehicles besieged by hail, rain and wind wound their way up the road leading to the natural area. Then, the spectators, covered in ponchos and armed with umbrellas, hiked the quarter-mile trail to Lindenmeier Overlook under an ominous sky so

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Directions to Soapstone
and Red Mountain

they could hear the words of some of the people most instrumental in the completion of Soapstone and Red Mountain.

Fort Collins Mayor Doug Hutchinson was among the first to speak, showing his enthusiasm and high hopes for the natural areas.

"This is serious, awesome open space," he said.

Hutchinson and his wife, Cathy, toured the space

when the project began and were excited by the possibilities. Now that it is complete, Hutchinson is looking to the future.

"Fifty years from now, people are going to come here, and they're going to look back and say 'wow,'" he said.

City councilman and mayor pro-tem Kelly Ohlson and his wife, Lisa Stanley, were surprised by the unveiling of a plaque at Lindenmeier Overlook honoring them for their work on natural areas. Ohlson was speechless after the plaque was revealed but had time to

collect himself when the ceremony was moved from Soapstone to the safety of the Waverly School gym because of the impending storm.

In the gym, the speeches continued, including one from Ohlson, who gave a brief history of open areas in Northern Colorado after expressing his thanks for the honor bestowed upon him and his wife. Ohlson said landscape preservation initiatives such as Soapstone and Red Mountain are mostly citizen efforts that include hundreds of people.

See AREAS/Page A2

Open lands manager ready to hit the trail

BY KEVIN DUGGAN

KevinDuggan@coloradoan.com

K-Lynn Cameron is hiking away from a job she loves.

Cameron is leaving her post as manager of the open lands program in the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources after 13 years.

Her resignation was announced in April with the intention of tying her departure to the grand opening of the county-owned Red Mountain Open Space and Fort Collins' Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

But she postponed her last day of work to June 16 so she

could meet one more time with Larimer County commissioners to discuss the importance of building partnerships in order to make the county's open spaces accessible to more people.

Cameron plans to take the summer off before deciding what to do next. She plans to continue living in Fort Collins and stay active in the conservation community.

"My heart is still in protecting the special places in Larimer County, and there are still many places to protect," she said.

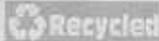


Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

K-Lynn Cameron stands Thursday at Red Mountain Open Space north of Fort Collins.

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Areas

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Soapstone will be managed by the city of Fort Collins, while Red Mountain is owned and managed by Larimer County. Both areas are part of the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project, a collaborative land protection effort among willing landowners, Larimer County Open Lands Program, the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, The Nature Conservancy, Legacy Land Trust and Great Outdoors Colorado. To date, the project has protected more than 55,000 acres of land.

Soapstone includes more than 28 square miles of landscape, 35 miles of trails and information about the cultural history of the area. The history lesson begins with the Paleo-Indian of the Ice Age and ends with homestead ruins and the foundation of a schoolhouse, touching on the many eras in between. Visitors can also hike, bike or ride on horseback to take in the stunning views.

Red Mountain offers many of the same amenities, including hiking, biking and horseback riding, but focuses more on the Earth's history than that of the people who once walked on it.

Visitors to Red Mountain will find 14 miles of trails that connect to the trails that are a part of Soapstone, as well as various landforms, geologic formations and wildflowers native to the area.



Michael G. Seamans/The Coloradoan

Fort Collins city manager Darin Atteberry, bottom left, shakes hands with city councilman Kelly Ohlson during the dedication ceremony of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space on Sunday.

Soapstone opened to the public Saturday with a bike tour and a performance by the Colorado State University Ram Nation Drummers.

Red Mountain postponed its grand opening because of inclement weather, but Larimer County officials hope they can open the area Saturday. Celebrations will include presentations and guided hikes to learn about the landscape and plants in the area.

Want to go?

- > **Soapstone Prairie Natural Area directions:** Travel north from Fort Collins on Colorado Highway 1 (Terry Lake Road) to Larimer County Road 15. CR 15 continues north. Take this road where it will turn into the Rawhide Flats Road. Continue north to the entrance station.
- > **Red Mountain Open Space directions:** Take Colorado Highway 1 (Terry Lake Road) to Larimer County Road 15 (Waverly turnoff). Go left on CR 15 to County Road 78. Go left on CR 78 to County Road 17. Go right on CR 17 to County Road 80. Go left on CR 80 to County Road 19. Go right on CR 19 to County Road 21. Go left on CR 21 for about 7 miles to the trail-head parking area.

Open

Continued from Page A1

Cameron started with Larimer County in 1981 as a contract employee charged with finding ways to fund a natural areas program. In 1983, she was hired as a full-time planner for the parks department.

She helped develop a master plan for the parks system in 1993 that led to a grassroots effort to create an open lands program.

The first ballot proposal to fund a county program failed. But in 1995, voters overwhelmingly supported a .25 percent sales tax dedicated to open space with part of the money going back to municipalities.

Voters renewed the tax in 1999 and gave the program bonding authority, allowing it to buy mountain property and agricultural land before their prices soared beyond reach.

Cameron became the open lands manager in 1996. She created a program that would become the envy of other counties.

Fueled by the sales tax, in 13 years the program has protected more than 43,000 acres. Its crown jewels include Red Mountain, the Devil's Backbone Open Space and Hermit Park Open Space near Estes Park.

Red Mountain and Soapstone are part of a larger plan — the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains Project — aimed at protecting 55,000 acres in the northern part of the county.

Funding big-ticket items required building partnerships with property owners, municipalities, land trusts and sundry federal and state agencies.

Strong partnerships will keep the county's program going, Cameron said, as it faces a time when its funds for acquiring more land is low and it must pay off the bonds that helped it reach this point.

"That doesn't mean we can't protect more land," she said. "We just have to find creative ways to pay for it."

Cameron brought "energy and vision" to the county's program, said Peter Kast, who served six years on the Open Lands Advisory Board. She surrounded herself with people who shared her enthusiasm for the work, he said.

"She took an idea that was

on paper and made it the spectacular program it is," he said.

Cameron said she'll miss the job she created but added "it's time to move on and hand the reins over to others."

She'll miss working with county staff members, elected officials, volunteers and members of the advisory board, Cameron said.

But she'll most miss working with private property owners who are willing to save their land for future generations by letting it go.

Negotiations for land acquisitions are long and delicate, she said. A critical point is when the owner "takes you out to show you every nook and cranny, every place that is special to them."

"You see exactly the beauty that they see in it," she said.

Event allows for happy trails

BY MOLLY ARMBRISTER
For Loveland Connection

Spectators at Sunday's dedication ceremony for Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space challenged Mother Nature.

First a parade of buses and vehicles besieged by hail, rain and wind wound their way up the road leading to the natural area.

Then, the spectators, covered in ponchos and armed with umbrellas, hiked the quarter-mile trail to Lindenmeier Overlook under an ominous sky so they could hear the words of some of the people most instrumental in the completion of Soapstone and Red Mountain.

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