

Thursday Reporter-Herald January 20, 2011



River Bluffs Open Space provides a respite not far from Loveland, Fort Collins and Windsor, and another half mile of the Poudre River Trail. The newly opened natural area combines riparian habitat and river access with grazing land and dryland bluffs.

Reporter-Herald/PAMELA DICKMAN

Budding beauty

River Bluffs Open Space holds promise for spring

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

WINDSOR — The skeletons of trees that have shed their color for the season stand stark against the partially frozen Poudre River.

A dryland bluff dabs golden brown hues on the sky-blue canvas — the two very different ecosystems separated by grazing land.

River Bluffs Open Space, which opened in December, is like a winter sleeping beauty — its visage breathing with the promise of life and more beauty to awaken with spring's kiss.

Larimer County purchased the 160-acre parcel just north of Windsor (and east of Ptarmigan) in 2006 for \$1.92 million, mostly covered by Colorado lottery money.

Since then, federal and state money along with contributions from Windsor and Larimer County extended the Poudre River Trail under Colorado 392 and a half mile through River Bluffs.

The fully paved trail is one more

How do I get there?

From Interstate 25, head east on Colorado 392 (the Windsor exit) to Larimer County Road 3 and turn north. About a half mile down the road, turn east on County Road 32E. The parking lot is a short distance on the right.

piece of an effort that started four decades ago to connect Greeley to north Fort Collins by footpath.

Currently 22.5 miles of the Poudre River Trail extend from Island Grove Park through River Bluffs.

The trail ends there, for now, and picks up on the other side of Interstate 25 at the Colorado State University Environmental Learning Center and continues for another 13 miles.

In coming years, Fort Collins, Timnath and Larimer County will all pick up pieces and miles in between to connect the trail.

Larimer County ended 2010 with the acquisition of a conservation easement that will allow crews to continue the



The Poudre River winds through River Bluffs Open Space.

trail another 1.5 miles north of River Bluffs.

The mixture of riparian and dryland habitat and the wildlife that goes along adds more than just a half mile to the Poudre River Trail.

The open space is an experience within itself.

And with picnic table and spots to reach the river for wading and fishing, there are plenty of ways to experience the beauty.

After all, that's what the county bought it for.

Trippin'

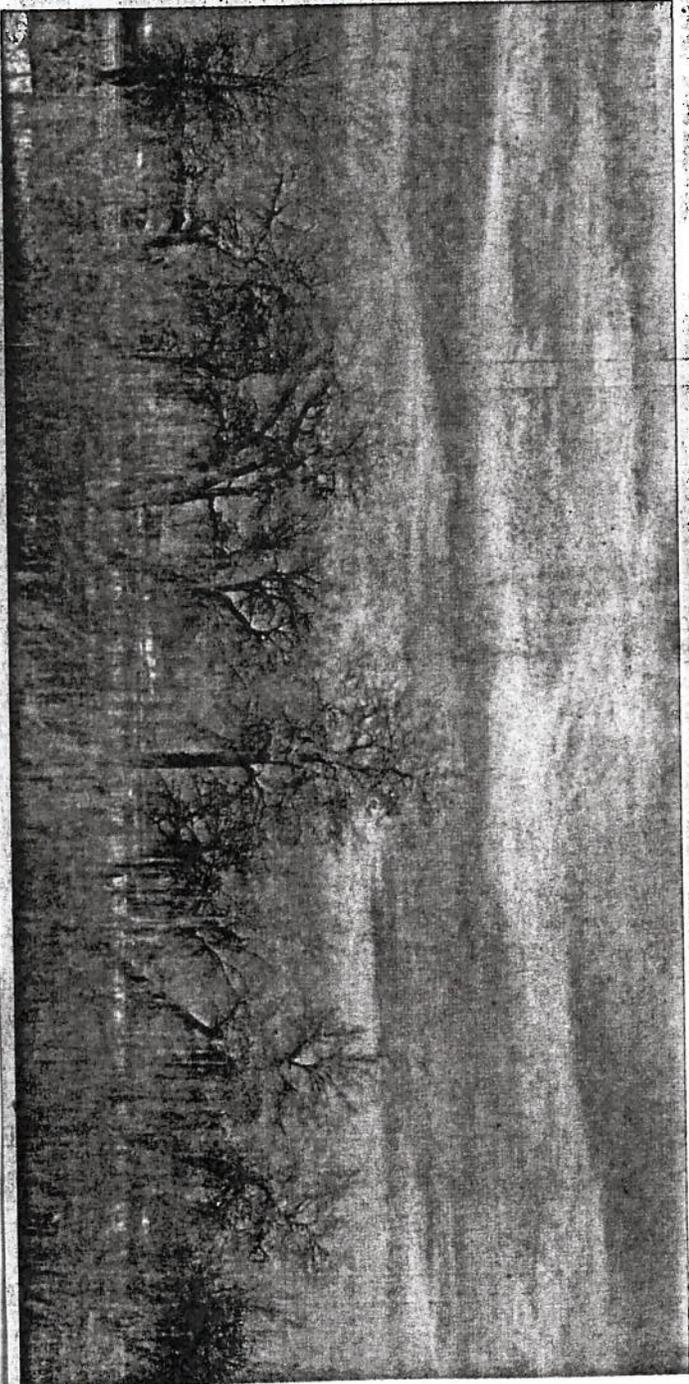
proceeds

River Bluffs poised to be popular site

BY DAWN WILSON
For The Coloradan

In December, River Bluffs Open Space officially opened to the public, becoming the newest and 10th publicly accessible open space in the Larimer County Open Lands Program.

Located east of Fort Collins between Windsor and Timnath, the 161-acre parcel includes a half-mile of paved trail as an extension of the 21-mile Poudre River Trail. This trail has been a group effort by the towns of Windsor, Timnath and Greeley and Larimer and Weld counties for more than 40 years. Fort Collins also has a section of the Poudre River Trail with more than 10 miles of paved trail from the Educational Learning Center off of East Drake Road to North Overland Trail. The two sections of the Poudre River Trail will be connected



in the coming years to create 45 miles of continuous trail from LaPorte to Greeley. River Bluffs Open Space

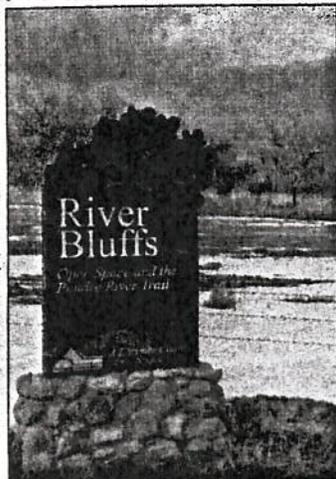
gets its name from the bluffs on the western side of the property called the Windsor Bluffs. The bluffs provide a dry habitat for reptiles such as the horned lizard and rattlesnake.

In contrast, on the northeast corner of the property, the Poudre River meanders through thick cottonwoods and willows to create a healthy riparian corridor. The river and wooded areas provide shelter and habitat for ducks, owls, white-tailed deer and fox.

Between the two different ecosystems is a working farm where a local rancher grows alfalfa.

Early morning or dusk at River Bluffs Open Space provides the best opportunities for seeing wildlife as well as beautiful views of sunrise and sunset. Look for owls, eagles and other birds of prey in the trees along the river and eastern border of the open space.

You can enjoy an afternoon of hiking and biking by starting from the parking area on Larimer County Road 32E and following the paved trail as it parallels the Poudre River on the north side. At the bridge, visitors will find access points to the river for fishing or wading in warmer weather.



Photos courtesy of Dawn Wilson

The 161-acre River Bluffs Open Space opened in December between Windsor and Timnath. At top, sunset colors cottonwoods at the open space.

Cross the bridge to the south side of the river and then continue on the trail as it heads southeast along the river.

The trail continues under Colorado Highway 392 where it continues through open fields and wetland areas on the south side of the highway. Look for paw tracks in the snow on the frozen ponds identifying the presence of fox, coyote and other small mammals.

Follow the path into the

River Bluffs Open Space

> **Where:** From Fort Collins, take Harmony Road east across Interstate 25. Take a right onto Larimer County Road 5 and head south. Take a left onto County Road 32E. The parking lot is on the right-hand side of the road just past the bridge over the Poudre River.

> **Open:** Daily dawn to dusk

> **Admission:** Free

> **Pets:** Leashed and on trail only

> **Facilities:** Ample parking in the lot, along with a bike rack and water fountain. A flush toilet and picnic area are in the final stages of construction.

Frank State Wildlife Area, stopping to read the interpretive signs about when bison roamed this area and the history of the area.

For the eager explorer, the trail continues for another 20 miles to Island Grove Park in Greeley.

The Coloradoan, Sunday, February 6, 2011

IN BRIEF

Hunting permit applications being accepted

Nine special access hunting permits are available through a drawing to hunt deer and elk at the Larimer County Natural Resource-managed Red Mountain Open Space.

The drawing for the 2011 big game season is for two bull elk, three cow elk and four buck deer special access permits.

All applications must be submitted online. The deadline to apply is Feb. 28. Apply at www.larimer.org/naturalresources. The drawing will be March 8.

Chapters to have

Reporter-Herald February 6, 2011

Land steward named to post

FORT COLLINS — K-Lynn Cameron built the Larimer County Open Lands Program over 25 years.

Now, she will continue her legacy of conserving land through a non-profit that works closely with the county.

Cameron was named director of land conservation with the Legacy Land Trust.

The land trust is a Fort Collins-based organization that works to protect key natural, scenic and agricultural land in Northern Colorado.

Cameron is a Colorado native who helped Larimer County protect more than 42,000 acres of land with local and state partners, preserving habitat, river corridors, community buffers and sensitive ecosystems.

Get facts on Pleasant Valley Trail

LAPORTE — Larimer County's Engineering and Natural Resources departments will hold an open house to provide information about the Pleasant Valley Trail Reconstruction Project from 4:45 to 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at Cache la Poudre Elementary School, Flex Room 168, in LaPorte on County Road 54G.

The bike/pedestrian path improvement project will take place along County Road 54G in the LaPorte area.

Larimer County received a federal enhancement grant for improvements to the trail between Cache la Poudre Middle School northwest to McConnell Drive along the south side of Larimer County Road 54G.

Construction is tentatively scheduled in March and April.

Information about the construction schedule, road closures and detour options will be available, and people can ask questions, make comments and discuss the project with Larimer County staff.

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