

Larimer County commissioners plan hikes to set example for healthy activities

By Pamela Dickman Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:

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Fresh air, exercise and the great outdoors are beyond fun -- they're also healthy for the heart, mind and soul.

"It's really becoming well-known that being outdoors and walking and being as active as possible is beneficial," said Jane Viste, spokeswoman for Larimer County Department of Health and Environment. "The contact with nature just makes people feel much better, being outside, breathing fresh air."

If You Go

What: Healthy Counties, Healthy Families, hikes led by Larimer County commissioners as part of County Government Month.

When: Saturday, April 21, 2-4 p.m., Eagles Nest Open Space, led by Lew Gaiter. Take U.S. 287 north of Fort Collins to Red Feather Lakes Road (74E), turn left and continue west for about a third of a mile to the parking lot. Hike and admission into open space are free.

When: Saturday, April 28, 2-4 p.m., Soderberg Open Space, led by Steve Johnson. Parking lot is off Shoreline Drive just northwest of Inlet Bay at Horsetooth Reservoir. Hike is free, but there is a \$6 per vehicle entrance fee into the open space.

This month, county health and natural resources officials are urging residents to do just that -- get outdoors, breathe fresh air and enjoy nature -- at some of Larimer County's highlighted open spaces with hikes led by the elected county commissioners.

"It's just absolutely gorgeous," Commissioner Lew Gaiter said of Eagle's Nest Open Space, preserved land near Livermore on which he will lead a hike Saturday.

"It's a great view of the mountains. It's a great view of the plains. ... There's fresh air, a fairly easy hike, and on the right day, you can actually see the eagles."

Eagles nest is named after the majestic raptors that have nested on the property for more than 100 years, property that was purchased by Larimer County in 2001.

The 755 acres boast 5 miles of trails for hiking and horseback riding.

Gaiter's counterpart, Commissioner Steve Johnson, will lead a hike closer to Fort

Collins the following Saturday, April 28, celebrating the great outdoors and Larimer County history. At Soderberg Open Space -- part of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space and its 29 miles of trail, views of mountains and meadows -- Johnson will lead a hike past the historic Soderberg homestead.

Larimer County bought the bulk of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space -- and its iconic Horsetooth Rock -- from the Soderberg family in the mid 1980s and has since developed a web of connected trails for all sorts of outdoorsmen, women and children.

Both commissioners are hoping for better weather than the third commissioner, Tom Donnelly, experienced on his hike at Devil's Backbone the afternoon of April 14.

"It was in the 70s all morning, then it dropped to the 50s, high winds and kind of like sleet," said Donnelly. "It's Colorado."

And still, as Donnelly put it, "a few hardy souls" showed up and joined the Loveland man, his four children and Larimer County resource specialist Meegan Flenniken for an abbreviated hike and a history lesson on the geology of Larimer County.

Together, they hiked the 0.4-mile Morrison Loop trail, part of the 12 miles of trail at Larimer County's first public open space located west of Loveland.

All three hikes, like many others in parks and open spaces throughout the county, the cities and towns, Rocky Mountain National Park and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, are great, according to Viste, for strengthening the heart, joints, muscles, bones, mental health and family ties.

She added, "It's wonderful we have all these great parks and open spaces."

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**County doles out \$17,437
in community grants**

LOVELAND — Big Thompson Elementary School received a \$2,000 grant from the Larimer County Open Lands Program for its playground project.

Each year, the Open Lands program awards up to \$2,000 to several community projects. This year, they awarded a total of \$17,437.50 to 10 different groups.

In addition to the playscape project, \$2,000 awards went to the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps for summer programs and Buckeye Community Club for a handicapped accessible restroom facility at the school.

Other grants are:

- \$1,996.50 to Hearts and Horses for a sensory trail.
- \$1,900 to Soaring Eagle Ecology Center for an outdoor classroom, parking and path.
- \$1,874 to Poudre Wilderness Volunteers to maintain backcountry trails.
- \$1,800 to Friends of the Gardens on Spring Creek for educational signs.
- \$1,367 to Mulberry Community Gardens.
- \$1,300 to Dean Acres Homeowners Association to enhance a natural area.
- \$1,200 to University of Northern Colorado for a survey at River Bluffs Open Space.

More information is available online at www.larimer.org/openlands/smallgrants.htm.

— Reporter-Herald staff

Cottonwood chips to be offered for free one day only

From a press release Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

FORT COLLINS – Cottonwood chips/mulch will be offered to the public free of charge by the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Saturday, April 28, at River Bluffs Open Space trail head parking lot, 6101 East County Road 32E, Fort Collins.

The chips/mulch will be available one time only. There is a limited amount of the chips/mulch and it will be offered on a first come, first serve basis until gone. Participants must provide a vehicle to haul it away and appropriate hand tools to load it.

It's a perfect time to use these chips/mulch for landscaping and gardening, and it will help clean up the debris at one of the County's beautiful Open Spaces left by the snow storm last fall. For details, contact Charles Gindler at gindlecm@co.larimer.co.us.

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Garfield County coalition pushing for an open space program and tax

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A coalition of Garfield County residents wants to create an open space program funded by a new countywide sales tax.

The group, the Garfield Legacy Project, is aiming to place the new tax on the November ballot.

Formed in 2009 with funding from a state conservation grant, they have been gauging support for the idea and attempting to spread the word about potential benefits of an open space program.

“Our hope is to get the program put together, get it voted on, and get it passed in November,” said Mary Noone, co-chair of the Legacy Project.

They are eying an additional quarter-penny sales tax, which they estimate would produce \$2.5 million in annual revenue. A sales tax may be more popular with voters than a property tax, Noone said, citing statistics that show non-Garfield County residents pay a majority of the county sales tax when they visit or are passing through.

The county commissioners would have to clear the question to go on the ballot. The Legacy Project is now polling residents on their support of the idea. They’re hoping poll results will be strong enough to sway the commissioners to put a tax question to voters.

Commissioners have expressed interest in seeing polling data on the sales tax. Noone said they plan to present results from the poll to the board this summer.

Commissioner Tom Jankovsky said he would support putting the item on the ballot if the polls showed support above “60 to 65 percent.” But the commissioner was unsure whether he would vote for any new taxes this fall.

“It’s a real tough time to get any kind of tax approved,” he said. “I don’t know if I’m a supporter or not, but I would be open to putting it on the ballot.”

Jankovsky also noted that Garfield County voters have twice rejected an open space tax. The last time it was on the ballot was 2001, with an initiative that would have created a special taxing district.

“This is a very conservative county,” he said.

Legacy Project leaders conducted a previous poll in 2010, which showed lukewarm support for the idea.

They backed off of the ballot campaign then, and decided to focus on raising public awareness of conservation issues in the 3,000-square-mile county.

Noone said they wanted to wait until the local economy improved, along with sentiment for new taxes.

“We’ve turned a big corner, I feel,” Noone said of local consumer confidence.

They’ve been focusing their open space outreach on issues of water quality, ranching, wildlife, habitat protection and increasing outdoor recreation opportunities.

Recent outreach efforts have included meetings with recreation groups, including ATV riders.

It’s a less tax-friendly constituency than the upper Roaring Fork Valley, where Pitkin County voters have overwhelmingly supported an open space property tax since 1990. It has given the county a veritable war chest of conservation funds to often buy properties outright. The property tax is expected to generate about \$10.4 million this year.

“Garfield County is very different from Pitkin County,” Noone said. “A property tax would not work down here.”

The Legacy Project leaders want to establish an open space board, to be appointed by the county commissioners and made up of Garfield County residents, to oversee the funds. The voluntary program would invite interested landowners to present potential conservation easements on their properties to the open space board.

Legacy Project leaders are modeling the idea after Routt County’s taxpayer-funded Purchase of Development Rights program, which is overseen by a citizen advisory board and has focused on protecting land through conservation easements. Since its founding in 1997, the program is estimated to have conserved more than 11,000 acres.

As the group is pitching it, the program would give owners of open land or working ranchers an option beyond selling to developers. Noone characterized it as a “completely voluntary open land program.”

“We want to give property owners more options on what to do with their land,” Noone said. “We hope they would want to put it in a conservation easement.”

The group plans to soon release maps that display land they hope to preserve which is under threat of development.

As examples, she said the tax-funded program might be able to provide easements to open up properties like the Sutey Ranch outside Carbondale. It could also protect ranchland from development, like the former ranch that is now the site of a Target store and parking lot in Glenwood.

Noone is a painter whose work has focused on local vistas for the last 30 years. She said that many of her paintings capture areas that have either been closed to public access — like Sutey — or built on, like Aspen Glen.

“I’m desperate not to lose more of these places and that’s how I got into this,” she explained.

The initiative has won the support of the Sonoran Institute and the Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT).

“We’re about to get to the point where we have maps that can identify priority areas,” said AVLT executive director Martha Cochran.

Twenty out of Colorado’s 64 counties have open space conservation programs, including Pitkin and Eagle counties.

In the fall, the Legacy Project hosted workshops that included presentations from Larimer, Eagle, Jefferson and Routt counties on their programs. They held open house-style meetings in Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, Parachute and Rifle.

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Adams County seeks input for new open space plan

By *Yesenia Robles* *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*
Posted:

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Adams County officials are in the midst of gathering opinions about new plans for open space — and the ideas run the gamut.

"We have all of these great natural resources, but we don't have connections between them," said Kathy Spinella, a county resident who wants to see trails connecting Barr Lake State Park to the South Platte River and other open land in the area.

Spinella was one of about 15 Adams County residents who showed up Tuesday at the Adams County Fairgrounds for a hearing to elicit ideas on new plans for the county's open space.

Spinella also said she wants to see preservation for agricultural areas that produce locally grown food.

As it turns out, opinions have so far been all over the map.

"We haven't found a priority that stands out," said Shannon McDowell, the county's open-space program manager. "There's a lot of interest in connections to amenities and a growing trend to continue having locally grown food."

The county's last master plan directing open-space projects was written in 1999, and many of the goals set out in that blueprint have been completed.

"The county has changed a lot — we have a lot of growth," McDowell said. "We have done the assessment of what resources we have. Now we need the community's input to tell us how they value those resources."

Earlier survey results presented during the hearing showed that only 17 percent of residents think the county provides enough open space.

Two more meetings are scheduled today to gather ideas on the county's open space — at noon and 6 p.m. at the Bennett Community Center, 1100 Colfax Ave., in Bennett.

Once the draft plan is written, likely in June, the county will again seek input from residents and expects to take another month or two to consider changes based on that feedback.

Once that's done, the plan will go to the county commissioners for approval.