

Estes Park is target for families connecting to nature

By Rene Goodman Special to the Trail-Gazette Estes Park Trail-Gazette

Posted:

eptail.com

The recent results from the extensive Larimer County "Plug in to Nature" study will be presented to the community on Aug. 27 at 7 p.m. in the Estes Park High School cafeteria. Community minded people who are concerned about future growth and development in Estes Park will be interested in the findings from this extensive study. Rob Novak, education program coordinator, will present the program and there will be plenty of time for questions about how these findings present potential opportunities for our mountain town.

What is "Plug in to Nature"? During the Great Outdoors Colorado's (GOCO) strategic planning process in 2010 the board consistently heard from constituents about the decrease "participation by youth and families in all areas of connection to nature and the outdoors." This trend, sometimes referred to as Nature Deficit Disorder, affects a number of areas including student achievement, public health, children's social abilities, and attitudes towards conservation and outdoor recreation.

In a first step to address these concerns GOCO funded a special pilot project in Larimer County entitled "Plug in to Nature." The goals were to first determine citizens' views on the levels of connection between families and the natural world, second to reveal gaps and barriers that prevent such connection, and finally to identify opportunities on which to build.

Why Larimer County? GOCO chose Larimer County because of its diverse communities and myriad of public lands. Estes Park is one of the key mountain communities studied during this project, and the results of the study have far reaching implications for practices and partnership which foster what the public is seeking - connecting youth and families to the outdoors.

GOCO also selected Larimer County because of the existing effort, "Children and Nature Connection -- Northern Colorado," which has already raised awareness in our area, providing numerous programs about the vast disconnect between the younger, electronic generations and nature.

GOCO published the initial results of this study in March 2012. The study goes beyond simply considering Nature Deficit Disorder. The analysis includes how lands are conserved and outdoor programming is offered. It blends together what the public perceives as its needs and what they see as the barriers which prevent them from achieving those needs.

The program did extensive research to identify land characteristics which were perceived as having highest value for making connections to nature. Not surprisingly, citizens listed mountains, trails, forest and water as being most important. The map revealing these valued lands will be of special interest to those of us living in Estes Park. There was a strong desire for nature centers and additional natural areas that provide winter activities and increased access to water.

Mark your calendar today to come hear this vital information and consider its implications for the future. The study provides the framework of research and data to allow local agencies, schools, non-profits and town governments to establish practices and partnerships that speak to the documented needs of our citizens.

Mountain biker bitten by rattlesnake in rare attack

Aug. 28

coloradoan.com

First aid for snake bites:

- Remain calm so as not to increase circulation and spread the venom.
- Immediately remove anything from the body that may cause increased swelling below the bite area (rings, watch, shoes, tight clothing, etc.)
- If possible, wash the wound with soap and water. If available, a Sawyer Extractor Pump may be used to remove some of the venom. Be familiar with the instructions before you need to use it.
- Immobilize the bite area, keeping it in a neutral to below-the-heart position.
- Get to the hospital immediately. The use of approved antivenin is the most effective treatment. If possible, have another person drive and call ahead to the hospital and poison center.

Source: Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center What Not To Do:

- Do not use a tourniquet.
- Do not make an incision at the bite site.
- Do not suck out the venom with your mouth as this may increase the risk of infection.
- Do not pack the limb in ice.

*Source: www.ext.colostate.edu

Rattlesnake bites by the numbers

2009: 6

2010: 6

2011: 4

Year to date July 2012: 2

Source: Poudre Valley Health System

A lot of risks come with mountain bike riding the Front Range. Broken bones, dehydration, flat tires, jagged rocks and cactus are all threats that accompany any ride. However, there is another risk that may go overlooked because it isn't always as obvious: snakes.

With summer coming to a close, it is a prime time for rattlesnake activity along the Front Range as they prepare to mate before going into hibernation later this year.

For the second time in 15 years, a mountain biker riding along Devil's Backbone in Larimer County was bitten by a rattlesnake two weeks ago. A rattlesnake sitting just off the path struck him in the lower leg as he rode past, said Travis Rollins, operations manager for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

The man continued riding, thinking he had been stuck by a yucca plant, before the pain sunk in and he saw the puncture wounds. He then went back and saw the snake coiled near the trail, Rollins said.

The man was riding with his nephew near sunset when the attack occurred outside of cell phone range. The man was able to ride to the trailhead where he was taken to the hospital and treated.

Mating season

In the heat of the summer, trail users are less likely to see a snake than they are now. Bob Reed, U.S. Geological Survey Research Wildlife Biologist, said this time of year is the peak of rattlesnake activity because the males are searching for a mate.

Last week, Reed came across a rattlesnake on a rock in the middle of the trail while riding his mountain bike behind Hughes Stadium. Reed let the snake alone and avoided becoming a bite statistic.

When it comes to rattlesnake bites, there are legitimate types, where the person is struck without knowing the snake was there, and illegitimate types, where a person — typically a young male — will see the snake and try to mess with it.

“Illegitimate is where a human interacts with a snake,” he said. “Most are males between 18 to 30. It’s more a testosterone problem than a venom problem.”

Approximately 75 percent of all snakebites occur in people ages 19 to 30 years old. Approximately 40 percent of all snakebites occur in people who are handling or playing with snakes, and 40 percent of all people bitten had a blood alcohol level of greater than 0.1 percent. Sixty-five percent of snakebites occur on the hand or fingers; 24 percent on the foot or ankle; and 11 percent elsewhere, according to city of Boulder records.

The number of rattlers out there is tied to the number of rodents available to eat. Reed said it is too early to tell what the rattlesnake population looks like for this year but said it has been very hot and dry this summer, meaning there may be less food for snakes.

To have a mountain biker bitten while riding is rare, said Reed, who rides Devil’s Backbone often. “I don’t think there is a need to be scared of these snakes or alter where you go based on them,” he said. “(Bites) are pretty darn uncommon.”

Rattlesnakes do a good job of warning people that they are going to attack with their rattle, said Reed.

If bitten, remain as calm as possible and try not to move, Rollins said. Call for help and try to get to the hospital as quickly as possible.

Snake attacks rare

The odds of being attacked by a snake are slim. When it comes to mountain bikers, they often speed by the snakes without seeing them. Rollins noted there also may be an unknown number of strikes that are not reported or missed.

For the thousands of hikers or walkers that use Larimer County’s trails each year, there only have been 5 reported rattlesnake bites in his 15 years here, Rollins said. The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources does not keep official records of snakebites, said Senior Ranger Steve Gibson.

Expanding outside the trail system, there have been fewer people who have sought medical treatment for rattlesnake bites to date this year than in previous years. Poudre Valley Health System has treated two people this year with antivenin for rattlesnake bites, compared to four people in 2011, six in 2010 and six in 2009.

Poisonous snakebites result in 12 to 15 deaths per year in the United States. There are two main families of poisonous snakes in the United States and Canada: pit vipers and coral snakes. Pit vipers include rattlesnakes, copperheads and cottonmouths, or water moccasins, according to city of Boulder records.

Some mountain bikers are acutely aware of snakes while riding.

Devin Hirning, of Fort Collins, is an avid mountain biker who has a healthy fear of rattlesnakes as he rides with his two boys ages 9 and 10 years old. Hirning often rides Devil’s Backbone and has seen snakes along the trails.

“My biggest concern is because of the kids,” he said. “My two boys, they freak out.”

While Hirning leaves it to his kids to decide if they want to ride, he will stick to heavily used trails to avoid rattlesnakes and has considered riding with Snake Guardz, a protective leg covering that shields from rattlesnake fangs.

Larimer County will trot out equestrian camping spots in 2013

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

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

HERMIT PARK -- The pines and aspens, the sweeping landscapes and majestic views, the wildflowers and meadows of Hermit Park are popular for hikers, campers and horseback riders alike.

But those in the saddle do not have the option of staying beyond the day, regaling their rides by campfire and waking up surrounded by the natural beauty of Hermit Park.

The 92 campsites currently open amid the 1,362 acres of Hermit Park -- two over the 90 allowed by the conservation easement on the property -- are not equipped for horses.

When the park opens next spring, five newly remodeled campgrounds will allow for horses with larger sites, corrals that house two animals at each site, and a parking lot big enough for trucks towing horse trailers.

Judging by the number of horseback riders who visit the park and its Homestead Meadows Trail and the number of requests for equestrian camping, ranger supervisor Bill Schultze expects the Kruger Equestrian Campground to be full every weekend.

So does Chris Fleming, supervisor over several parks and open lands in southern Larimer County.

"We have requests weekly to make it happen," she said. "It's finally happening."

The small loop of eight campsites is currently known simply as Campground 3, open from spring to fall each year for campers.

Next spring, it will accommodate equestrian campers with five larger sites, new vault bathrooms and a large Dumpster at the parking lot for waste.

Work on the \$224,000 project will begin Oct. 1. The money is from the county's open space sales tax, lottery proceeds and two area horse groups that donated a total of \$11,000.

Parking spots are staked out and ready for construction in a dirt field at the bottom of the camping loop, just off the main road around Hermit Park. Kruger Rock, at the top of a 1.7-mile trail, looms over the campground, which will be named after the natural feature.

The campsites are near the Homestead Meadows trailhead, which allows horses, and are spaced out enough they seem remote, the views majestic with a mix of aspens and pines.

"It's real nice, said Schultze. "It's small with a lot of trees, out of the way."

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Endangered status considered for rare wildflower found in Larimer County

By Laura Snider For the Reporter-Herald Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will spend the next year trying to determine whether a tiny wildflower that grows only in Colorado and only in seven known locations -- including in Larimer County -- should be listed as an endangered species.

The Rocky Mountain monkeyflower, which grows to be only about 4 inches high, is found in spruce, fir and aspen forests at high altitudes. The plants prefer cool, wet, seepy areas, often at the base of cliffs or on ledges.

But what really intrigues Taylor Jones, an endangered species advocate with Denver-based WildEarth Guardians, is the way the tiny plant reproduces.

"I'm fascinated by the fact that it has a really unique asexual reproduction that is not known in any other flowering plant," she said. "They create these little miniplants (known as propagules) on the bases of their leaves. Every year the adult plants will die and the little miniplants will shear away and get carried downstream and sometimes by the wind."

But the mini plants don't always find an appropriate place to root on their own, which may contribute to the difficulty the plant has had at maintaining its population levels.

And more oddly, the plant also can produce flowers for sexual reproduction, though they rarely do that in the wild. It's a mystery why the plant would have both sexual and asexual reproductive abilities.

In September 2011, WildEarth Guardians petitioned the federal government to consider protecting the Rocky Mountain monkeyflower under the Endangered Species Act. Last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife decided a more in-depth investigation into the plant's status is warranted.

Over the next year, the federal agency will do an analysis of the wildflower's circumstances to see whether it fits the guidelines for protection.

"We do not list a species just because it's rare," said Ellen Mayo, a botanist with the agency. "There does have to be an indication of substantial threat."

In making a decision, the agency will weigh whether the plant's habitat is in jeopardy, whether it's vulnerable to disease and whether or not there already are adequate measures in place to protect the plant, among other factors, Mayo said.

In the case of the Rocky Mountain monkeyflower, it appears that the plant may be especially at risk of being trampled.

"It grows in very cool, shady little stops along those really damp little places you like to go while you're hiking," Mayo said.

Populations of Rocky Mountain monkeyflowers have been found in five Colorado counties: Boulder, Clear Creek, Grand, Jefferson and Larimer.

Boulder County is home to the largest number of the plants -- more than 14,600, according to a study in 2005-06 -- and the little flowers are found between 10,121 feet and 10,259 feet on National Forest land in St. Vrain Canyon on the ledges on glacially carved cliffs.

"There's this pretty unique plant -- pretty much the only one of its kind that has this reproductive system -- and it's right in our backyard in the mountains," WildEarth Guardians' Jones said. "Endangered species aren't just off in the distant wilderness. They're right there. They could be right by your favorite trail; they could be right under your foot

if you're not careful."

Handwritten signature: K. K. K.

.org

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**Land conservation
feedback wanted**

The public is invited to kickoff "Our Land Our Future" with the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department from 7 to 9 p.m. Sept. 12 at New Belgium Brewing Co., 500 Linden St., Fort Collins.

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Citizens of Larimer County and its municipalities are invited to participate in the effort to evaluate the achievements, opportunities and possible gaps in the region's land conservation, open space and nature-based recreation programs.

RSVP at www.larimer.org/naturalresources/registration/index.cfm. Space is limited.

Coloradoan staff



Larimer County ready to restore shores of the Poudre River at Lions Park

By Pamela Dickman Loveland Reporter-Herald

ReporterHerald.com

FORT COLLINS — Larimer County hopes to begin, within the next week, reversing erosion along the shores of the Poudre River in Lions Park Open Space, located in LaPorte.

With \$350,000 from the city of Greeley, the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is ready to start moving dirt from the west side of the open space to the east side to begin shoring up the banks of the river.

The project — planned to be completed by November — will make the shores safe for residents to access the river, will prevent flooding of the public trail and will reverse sediment build-up that is destroying fish habitat, said Jeffrey Boring, resource specialist.

“We're hoping it this goes well, the whole Poudre River system will start restoration projects,” said Boring, who works for Larimer County's natural resources department.

While Colorado Parks and Wildlife (formerly Colorado State Parks) owns the protected acres of Lions Park, Larimer County has a perpetual lease to protect the land and maintain the open space for public recreation.

The area is located on North County Road 21C (or Overland Trail) in LaPorte next to Bingham Hill Park.

The land is popular for cycling, hiking, picnicking and fishing and includes a portion of the Poudre River Trail, which when complete, will stretch from east of Greeley to LaPorte.

However, the county has had to fence off access to the river because the banks are steep and dangerous and, at times, runoff so high it spills over the banks to a public trail, according to Boring.

The work to repair the shores will fix that and allow Larimer County to once again open access to the river with, in two place, stairs down to the water.

Crews will haul dump trucks of dirt from the west side of the park to the east side to complete the in-stream and bank work in 25 trips over seven days.

The initial work must be finished by Oct. 1 when fish spawning starts in the water.

Larimer County has all the appropriate permits and plans to begin work within the week after letting nearby property owners know the reason for the loads.

They anticipate one resident may be unhappy with the traffic over County Road 21F — a public road that is in the process of being converted to private road with the county maintaining an easement to use the road for maintenance of Lions Park.

Family wants to block access for Poudre River improvements

Sep. 04

coloradoan.com

A family's objections to government work trucks traveling across their property could delay erosion improvements at a popular recreation site on the Poudre River.

The Brinks family contends the city of Greeley's gesture to improve the riverbank at Lions Park south of LaPorte belies a more calculated motive. For five years, Rose Brinks has been fighting Greeley's plans to construct a 60-inch pipeline from the Poudre beneath her property, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"This has been a long and sorrowful journey — our fight to keep our land from being destroyed or taken over by the entities who want it," Brinks told the Coloradoan.

"I think things may get ugly if we don't have a face-to-face meeting with her soon," Jeffrey Boring, a resource specialist with Larimer County Parks and Open Lands, told county commissioners on Tuesday.

At Tuesday's meeting of the commissioners, Boring, other county staff and lawyers alerted the board to Brinks' objections and said they could stand in the way of reopening the river at Lions Park, which has been fenced off and closed to recreation since the summer of 2011 due to erosion caused by heavy runoff last year.

Greeley has offered \$350,000 worth of material to fortify the riverbank but wants access to the Poudre River at Lions Park from the south bank to do the work. That would require passage along a stretch of road recently vacated by the county and now under the Brinks family's control.

"The project's on hold until we can access this side," Boring said.

He told commissioners that time to complete the mitigation project is short. He said to avoid negatively impacting aquatic life, work within the river must be completed by Oct. 1, when fish spawning begins. Otherwise, "we may have to postpone it into the future," he said, "and we don't want to do that."

Boring said ideally, work on the riverbank project would begin this week, and it would be reopened for public use by mid-November.

Brinks' son, Jim Brinks, said he suspects Greeley's water and sewer department is seeking to address the erosion at Lions Park only to remove a potential obstacle to its ultimate goal of constructing the pipeline across his family's property.

Despite assertions by the city of Greeley and Larimer County that the erosion project and the pipeline are entirely separate issues, Jim Brinks said it is impossible to divorce them.

"Completing the erosion mitigation is a requirement before they can start the pipeline," Jim Brinks said. "That's the only reason that they're doing it."

City of Greeley spokeswoman Donna Brosemer acknowledged that the Army Corps of Engineers has imposed certain criteria for Greeley to meet before it can proceed with the pipeline, and erosion mitigation along the Poudre is one of them. But she denied the Lions Park project was chosen because of its proximity to

the pipeline site Greeley is eying across the Brinks' property.

"We have our choice of a number of areas that need mitigation, and most of them were pretty remote," Brosemer said. "Considering that Lions Park was on the list we had to choose from, we thought it would be much easier to meet our mitigation requirement in an area that people could enjoy."

Boring said approximately 25 trips by dump trucks over a five-day span would be necessary to complete the mitigation work within the river in time to avoid interrupting spawning. Larimer County commissioners approved vacating County Road 21F within the past month at the Brinks' request.

Even though vacating the road closes it to the public, it remains open to government vehicles for projects such as the riverbank rehabilitation, according to the county attorney's office. Beside, the necessary legal paperwork to vacate the road has not yet been filed.

Those facts aside, Jim Brinks said his family owns the land between the road and the riverbank, and he sees any encroachment onto it as trespassing. He said his family advocates alternative sites for both conducting the erosion rehab and constructing the pipeline.

Brosemer said entering the erosion work zone from the Brinks' road would be most efficient, and she said alternate sites for the pipeline that have been reviewed — namely through the center of LaPorte and across a nearby school's property — would be more disruptive than placing it on the Brinks' property.

Construction on the pipeline is not imminent, Brosemer said. And based on the report to Larimer County commissioners Tuesday, neither is the riverbank restoration.

Commissioners Tom Donnelly and Lew Gaiter said they hope to hold conversations with Rose Brinks to alleviate her concerns. Jim Brinks said that's not likely.

"We're prepared to fight it in court, fight it to the end if we have to," he said. "By no means do we intend to give up or give in."

"Why should we grant an easement, which will result in permanent and irreparable damage to our farm?" Rose Brinks said.

- Jim Rogers: It's Going To Get Really "Bad After The Election" (Money Morning)

Regional open space, outdoor recreation study to kick off at Sept. 12 event

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

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

FORT COLLINS -- All the cities and towns within Larimer County are banding together with the county Department of Natural Resources to look at what exists and what is needed for open lands, conservation and outdoor recreation in the region.

The study will kick off with a public event, 7-9 p.m. Wednesday (Sept. 12) at New Belgium Brewery in Fort Collins.

The Larimer County Natural Resources Department is spearheading a \$150,000 regional study paid for with a \$75,000 Great Outdoors Colorado grant and \$75,000 total from Larimer County, Fort Collins, Loveland, Berthoud, Estes Park, Johnstown, Timnath, Wellington and Windsor. The amount paid by each municipality is based on the percent of open space sales tax each receives.

Consultant Logan Simpson Design will complete the Our Lands – Our Future study over the next 10 months.

The process includes comprehensive mapping of open spaces, protected lands and outdoor recreation from border to border in the county.

The study also will reach out to residents via survey and community meetings.

A survey has been mailed to a random sample of 7,500 residents who live throughout the county and is also available online (<http://survey.rrcresearch.com/s3/Larimer2>). The results will be used by the county and municipalities to update open lands and conservation goals for the next decade.

Space is limited at the kickoff, so make sure to RSVP at www.larimer.org/naturalresources/registration/.

WolfWood Refuge brings ambassadors to Estes Park

By Juley Harvey Trail-Gazette Estes Park Trail-Gazette

Posted:

eprail.com

Listen up, Wyoming -- you don't have to shoot your wolves. WolfWood Refuge in Ignacio, Colo., will take the Wyoming wolves presently being slaughtered and care for them. Craig and Paula Watson of Wolfwood came to Hermit Park with their traveling pack of rescued full-blooded wolves and hybrid wolf-dogs on Saturday and Sunday, to amaze visitors and educate children. They hope that by educating people on the wonders of wolves, they can help to prevent the future slaughters of the wild, wonderful animals, such as are being sanctioned and systematically carried out by the federal and state governments in Wyoming and other Western states.

The Watsons displayed two of their nine-pack, full-blooded wolves, rescued from Alaska. The 15-month-old wolves cavorted like canines, obeyed their handlers, but also retained a sense of wild majesty about them. You knew you were Seeing Something. And that something was special -- and most likely, doomed.

The Watsons are doing what they can to prevent the wolves' planned extinction, at the hands of policy-makers. They are concentrating on places such as Alaska, to bring the wolves to safety before they are endangered there. They said they would welcome Wyoming wolves to their sanctuary and that there is no reason to have a federally-mandated shooting spree. There is an alternative -- the WolfWood Refuge.

They spread their word to about 3,000 schoolchildren a year. Some bureaucratic red tape kept them from appearing at Hermit Park last year, as they have in the past, but they were able to come again this year, to the delight of wolfie-loos. One of their most popular ambassadors, Willow, has retired and no longer travels with them, but she still welcomes visitors to the refuge. The Watsons said they are always delighted to visit Hermit Park and bring the wolves there, they are well-received and there is a good turnout. They also take their ambassador wolves to schools, clubs and organizations, for presentations and educational programs. Through education of the future voters is the way we will save the wolves, they say.

WolfWood is dedicated to protecting the welfare of wolves and wolf/dogs and promoting an understanding of these animals in the hope of dispelling fear and opening the way for a healthy relationship between humans and wolf/dogs.

For more information, call 970-946-9606,

email wolfwood1995@hotmail.com or see the wewebsite at wolfwoodrefuge.org.

Influence of study to guide sensible drilling on open space uncertain

Sep. 11

coloradoan.com

A thin line separates prosperity and preservation where petroleum development and natural areas are concerned.

Partners in Energy by Design, a collaborative effort to draw that line and minimize harm to interests on either side of it briefed Larimer County commissioners Tuesday on their progress.

The objective is to explore options that provide access to minerals under Soapstone Prairie, Red Mountain Open Space and Meadow Springs Ranch while at the same time protecting ecological, cultural and scenic resources in those areas, according to Meegan Flenniken of Larimer County's natural resources department.

Wildlife, breathtaking views, attractive recreation spots and historic sites span the surface of these public lands. Beneath it, a patchwork of mineral rights exist. The Colorado State Land Board owns about one-fourth of the mineral rights in the targeted area.

"The other major mineral owner is Anadarko ... and the major mineral lessee is Marathon Oil," Megan Kram, Energy by Design project manager for the ecologically oriented Nature Conservancy, told commissioners.

She presented a map that showed possible development sites within the three open-space zones in Larimer County. It showed some promise on the eastern edge of Soapstone Prairie and throughout Meadow Springs Ranch. Both sites are on the western fringe of the oil-rich Niobrara shale, but according to the map they both boast limited development potential relative to richer pockets of the same field to the east in Weld County.

"Fracking and the new technologies discovered there is really a lot of what's driving the development across the Eastern Plains," Kram said. Flenniken said in public comments throughout the Energy by Design process, concerns about hydraulic fracturing and its possible impact on water quality have been a common theme.

Will it inch west into the preserved lands in Larimer County? If so, will the Energy by Design study influence how energy companies develop the area, or how the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission — the final say on the matter — regulate it? Both are anybody's guess.

In part, that's because oil and gas companies have skirted the process and held their intentions close to the vest.

"We haven't had a lot of participation from the energy companies at this point," Flenniken informed the commissioners.

"We're not exactly sure why they didn't choose to jump in and participate," said Melissa Yoder of the State Land Board. "Whether they have plans of their own or whether they want to wait and see what the final maps look like, we're really not sure."

But Yoder said conversations between the State Land Board and the energy industry have been ample, and that many of the companies have reacted favorably to the Energy by Design process because they are hopeful that it provides "a path forward" to the least disruptive development options.

With the mineral potential in the open areas unproven, drilling is not imminent, according to Kram.

“This project is not looking to stop any mineral development, and it won’t prevent mineral extraction,” she said. “So we’re really looking at how to provide the access and limit impacts.”

“I just hope that’s the way the permits are issued and that’s the way it happens,” said Larimer County Commissioner Steve Johnson.

Energy By Design: Audit maps best ways for drilling, conservation to coexist on protected open lands

By Pamela Dickman Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

ReporterHerald.com

FORT COLLINS — While Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural area are preserved from development, the minerals underneath them are not.

So, Larimer County, Fort Collins, The Nature Conservancy and the Colorado Land Board have been working together on a plan for drilling to coexist with wildlife, to occur with the least amount of damage to the land, habitat and watershed.

“What we are creating now is recommendations,” said Megan Kram, project manager with The Nature Conservancy who spearheaded an Energy By Design look at the lands.

“The land board will create the binding documents.”

The Energy By Design audit is a proactive look at the best places and times to drill on the property to protect its natural and cultural resources. Kram and others who have worked on the study presented initial findings to the Larimer County commissioners Tuesday.

They presented multiple maps that show who owns the mineral rights throughout the protected lands, ranks drilling locations by impact and illustrates what seasons are more or less disruptive to which wildlife species. For example, the Lindenmeier historical archeological site and a captive breeding area for the black-footed ferret are earmarked as protected from drilling, while areas with roads and old barns are preferred sites.

There are an array of recommended levels of drilling on surrounding spaces, suggestions for restoring sites once drilling is complete and the option, in some cases, to offset damage with conservation measures in other locations.

The State Land Board, which owns 25 percent of the mineral rights in the area, participated and signed on with ensuring energy companies follow the recommendations on the lands for which they own the mineral rights.

Local elected officials, state land authorities and conservation specialists hope other drilling developers also will buy into the idea of working together to meet what are commonly seen as competing interests: conservation and energy development.

“There's a tremendous variability in the responsiveness of the drilling companies,” said Steve Johnson, county commissioner. “I like what you've done. I think it's a very good approach. I just hope that's the way the permits are issued, and that's the way it happens.”

Larimer County will have a minor role in issuing traffic-related permits for drilling, but the authority falls mostly to the state.

And while oil and gas companies did not come to the table on the initial Energy By Design Audit, feedback has been positive, said Melissa Yoder, external affairs specialist for the Colorado Land Board.

“The comments we've heard are, frankly, ‘We want this to work,’” Yoder said.

The audit is new for energy development in Colorado but similar studies have been successful in Wyoming, Mongolia, Columbia and Africa, said Kram.

Larimer County, Windsor seek input on open space projects

Sep. 13

coloradoan.com

Interested?

For more information about “Our Lands – Our Future,” visit the website at www.larimer.org/naturalresources/regionalstudy.

Larimer County wants the public’s feedback on where to go next with open space and recreation planning.

To get that feedback, the county has partnered with the municipalities in its jurisdiction — the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, and the towns of Berthoud, Estes Park, Johnstown, Timnath, Wellington and Windsor — to create a comprehensive study called “Our Lands – Our Future” dealing with open spaces, outdoor recreation and land conservation.

The study has a couple of parts, explained Melissa Chew, Windsor director of parks, recreation and culture.

“It’s a statistically valid survey and will be broken out for Windsor separately from Larimer County,” Chew said. “So we will see the results of our community.”

Chew encouraged Windsorites who live in Weld County to take the unofficial survey online as well.

“There are residents in Weld County who use the Larimer County facilities, and it will not hurt the survey results,” Chew said. “Our cost for this is about \$500.”

The idea for the study came up about a year ago, when Larimer County’s Natural Resources Department realized it had been about 10 years since they’d last conducted a resident survey.

“We spoke with representatives of the municipalities in the county and learned this was something that all of us needed to do,” said Kerri Rollins, Larimer County open lands program manager.

Larimer County residents passed a sales tax increase for the preservation of open spaces in 1995.

“This study is very comprehensive and different than what we’ve previously done,” Rollins said. “There are many different things we could choose to measure, but we want to focus on quality of life and the benefits from tourists.”

The study also has a financial component to it.

“If we never bought another acre, what would it cost to maintain what we have?” Rollins asked. “And if we choose to invest in more, what would that cost?”

There are questions about needs and preferences as well, for what the county offers and what the municipalities offer their residents.

“We’re doing a huge grassroots public outreach for this study,” Rollins said. “Each of our partner agencies has committed to doing coffee-talk style meetings, and there is a place on our website where residents can request meetings with us.

“We’re really making an effort to go out into the community.”

Mailed surveys have already gone out to Larimer County residents, and Rollins said they’re anxious to get those results back.

“The feedback is very exciting,” she said.