

## **60 girls competed for the chance to go on Tuesday's trip from Devil's**

### **Backbone to Fort Collins**

*By Jessica Benes Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald*

*Posted:*

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It started out chilly -- 45 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit -- and Bill Reed Middle School teacher Carolyn Sanders was afraid rain would come.

But it was warm by the end of the nine-mile hike and the young ladies enjoyed themselves, she said.

Sixty middle school girls hiked nine or 11 miles on Tuesday. The trip took them from Devil's Backbone to Canyon Grill off the Horsetooth trail in Fort Collins.

"The purpose is to get them outdoors on a long-distance endurance hike," said Sanders, a physical education teacher at Bill Reed Middle School.

The girls were happy to get out of school and spend time with friends all day.

And they worked hard for the chance.

All the ladies in PE classes at Bill Reed competed in a one-mile run and a 20-minute run for the chance to qualify at the top and be eligible for the field trip hike.

Some of the girls were nervous about the distance before the hike, and others were happy to do it again.

Clair Haenny, age 13 and an eighth-grader, participated last year. She remembers that she was nervous the first time but knew she could do it. And this year, she was just excited to have the experience again. "After you settle down afterwards, you start wishing you could do it again," Haenny said.

Sanders has been taking middle school students hiking for 15 years.

"The girls are all in shape. I know they can do it, but sometimes their mind-set is different. They get going and think, 'this is really hard,' but when they're finished, they're so proud of themselves," Sanders said.

They could choose to hike the straight nine mile trail, or an additional 1.7-mile loop. Twenty-eight students chose to go the extra distance.

Emily Baunoch hadn't done the hike before but was sure she could handle it fine because of PE class.

"It's only nine miles," her friend, Avery Zink, added. Both girls are in eighth grade. They were told to bring rain jackets but, while rain threatened, the girls didn't actually get wet on the trail.

"It teaches you about outdoors stuff and just to stay active because there are rewards other than staying fit," Zink said. She ran a lot this summer with her dad and went on trail runs. "They were light runs, not huge ones, not nine-mile runs," she said.

Camryn Kelley, 12, was nervous because she hadn't done that long a hike before. Sanders said that the journey was tough on Kelley, but she still had fun.

"When I got there I was excited because I saw a bunch of my friends there. I found early that it was pretty easy."

She said that they saw deer and wildlife along the way, and ran most of the last mile. "I felt really accomplished and good," she said.

The boys will have their chance to hike next week.

"It's important to learn at a young age what's out there and what you're capable of doing," Sanders said. "Shoot for the stars, right?"

Jessica Benes can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 530, or [jbenes@reporter-herald.com](mailto:jbenes@reporter-herald.com). Follow her on Twitter: [@JessicaBenes](https://twitter.com/JessicaBenes).

## **75 years in, Northern Water is looking to complete new projects that will benefit the region in the same way it always has**

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

*Posted:*

ReporterHerald.com

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BERTHOUD -- A handful of dreamers walked out of the Weld County Courthouse 75 years ago with four papers that led to the culmination of their vision of bringing over water from the western slope.

It's an accomplishment that became the cornerstone of the industry, farms, cities and quality of life that we enjoy today.

The Northern Water Conservancy District formed on Sept. 20, 1937, specifically to build the Colorado-Big Thompson water project to bring water from the Colorado River to what is now the growing, vibrant Front Range.

A small group shared that idea during the country's greatest financial crisis and during a time of unparalleled drought.

Residents were out of work, families starving during The Great Depression.

Walls of dust were swirling enough to cause pneumonia, to kill cattle to smother crops, to cause havoc during what is now known as the Dust Bowl.

Yet residents had a vision and pushed through opposition, through financial roadblocks to create a then unprecedented contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, to build the \$164 million tunnel, reservoir and canal system, and to turn what seemed like an impossible feat of the imagination into the foundation of our region.

"They gave this region the future, a priceless gift that many of us take for granted," Eric Wilkinson, general manager of the water district, told hundreds at a celebration Thursday -- 75 years to the day that the district, now known as Northern Water, was formed.

Just less than 10 years after the district formed in 1937, crafted an agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation and convinced voters to support the project by a 17-1 margin, the first drops of water flowed through the Adams Tunnel over the continental divide and into the Big Thompson River.

That foundation of the project still exists with water stored in reservoirs on the west side and throughout Larimer County, including Carter Lake, Horsetooth, Flatiron and Pinewood Reservoirs.

The system still secures 214,000 acre feet of water per year, providing a necessary resource to residents, schools, businesses, farms and more. It banks water in wet years for arid times, provides revenue through hydroelectric power and allows our quality of life.

Now, 75 years in, Northern Water is looking to complete new projects that will benefit the region in the same way in the future, Mike Ryan, regional director of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, based out of Billings, Mont., said

Two proposed reservoirs -- Northern Integrated Supply Project and Windy Gap Firing Project -- are as key to the future as the Colorado-Big Thompson project was 75 years ago, Ryan and Mike Applegate, chair of the Northern Water board of directors, said.

Both proposals have come under fire for effects to water flow, aquatic life and recreational values of the Colorado

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and Poudre Rivers and remain in the permitting process.

But both are important to the future of the region, said Applegate.

"Our predecessors taught us that with a little foresight and a lot of perseverance, great things can happen," he said.

Pamela Dickman can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 526, or [pdickman@reporter-herald.com](mailto:pdickman@reporter-herald.com). Follow her on Twitter: [@pamelalittlebee](https://twitter.com/pamelalittlebee).

## **A conservation-easement scheme allegedly began with a lawyer trying to help out his brother.**

*By David Migoya The Denver Post The Denver Post*  
Posted:

DenverPost.com

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Alleged tax abuses that disgraced Colorado's conservation-easement program and launched state and federal investigations appear to have been rooted in little more than one brother trying to help another.

More than four years after revenue agents, regulators and legislators fixed loopholes in a system that nearly robbed state and federal governments of tens of millions in tax dollars, the fallout is just starting for the man many saw as the epicenter of the crisis.

Five lawsuits filed by jilted investors of Denver lawyer Rodney Atherton tell the tale of how he took an overlooked state program and quickly molded it into a financial windfall for himself, his family, his friends and many of his clients.

But the windfall didn't last. Investors say they lost millions of dollars in unsound deals and were double-dipped by companies run by Atherton or his family.

Some of the easement deals Atherton created — huge projects that on paper were real-estate developments — and the appraisals they balanced on were "abusive" and "fundamentally flawed," according to expert testimony filed in the lawsuits.

The alleged scheme germinated when Atherton looked to bail out his troubled big brother — a housing developer accused of misappropriating money meant for an Oklahoma real-estate project.

Atherton is alleged to have intentionally misled clients into investing in easement deals he offered as foolproof without ever telling them it was really to unravel the financial quagmire his brother had created.

From that deal, Atherton managed to get several people to invest over and over as he crafted each new easement proposal. In the process, he turned Colorado's conservation-easement program on its head.

"The laws were meant to help ranchers and farmers keep their land, not to allow the wealthy to become more wealthy at the expense of the state," said Alice Madden, Colorado's House majority leader, who helped craft the easement statutes.

Tax benefit increased in 2004

By the time Eugenia "Bini" Abbott and her husband, Meade, chose to conserve a 5-acre piece of their 85-acre ranch along Stanley Lake's western shore in Arvada, neighbor Rod Atherton was there to help.

It was 2004, and the state's conservation-easement rules were changing. Landowners could get more of a tax benefit from their donations — up to \$260,000.

If a landowner couldn't use the credits, the owner could sell them for cash, often at 80 cents on the dollar with commissions for the brokers as much as 7 cents more.

Atherton was a tax attorney at Greenberg Traurig, one of the country's top law firms, and knew the ins and outs of conservation easements. One investor described him as the firm's "guru" of easements.

He had already converted one for himself, across the street from his Arvada home, and another for a neighbor. In order to accommodate the deal, he even changed a nonprofit group, Noah's Crib, from one designed to help troubled kids to one that maintained donated land trusts.

The Abbotts said they simply wanted to ensure that encroaching housing developments stopped short of their doorstep.

Easements were usually very simple: Donate the land, and earn a tax deduction or credit equal to the drop in land value up to a certain amount. The maximum credit was the same no matter the size of the property.

But Atherton had a new idea — he testified he was not alone in devising it — to maximize the tax benefits of an easement. He'd do it by slicing the donation into pieces, then sell the parts to investors.

Then, with drawings indicating the subdivided property was destined for a housing development, each owner would donate the land into a conservation easement. The rub: Appraisers would value each lot as if development were a done deal, increasing the tax benefit by millions of dollars.

The idea would be the basis for nearly every easement Atherton created thereafter — even property in the most remote parts of eastern Colorado where housing starts were miles away. It was the root of about \$37 million in tax credits diverted from the Colorado treasury, most since disallowed.

What no one knew, however, was that the idea apparently came as Atherton looked to bail his brother Randall from a financial mess, documents in the lawsuits show.

Randall, 49 and a year older than Rod, managed Autumn Leaf, a development company in Moore, Okla., that owned about 10 acres of land with plans for 56 duplex homes to be called Autumn Oaks, according to the lawsuits.

Later accused by an investor of misappropriating the funds, Randall got help from Rod, who created a new venture in Colorado — Autumn Investments — with the intent of raising \$1.55 million. The money would solve Randall's problems and make use of Rod's new conservation-easement idea on the Abbotts' property.

But wealthy clients and friends Rod Atherton persuaded to buy into his new investment plan say they never knew the real reason.

One of those who bought into Autumn Investments was Atherton client Blaine Rollins, a well-known money manager at Janus who would later find notoriety by working and investing with hedge-fund manager Sean Mueller, now serving time for running a Ponzi scheme.

According to his lawsuit against Atherton, Rollins paid \$900,000 for a 58 percent membership in Autumn. He did so, he said, because he had already done business with Atherton before, having purchased \$80,000 worth of state tax credits from him that were from another easement deal.

It turns out that the tax credits on that deal were Atherton's from the easement he did across from his home, the lawsuit says.

That wasn't the only time Atherton double-dealt with clients, the lawsuits say. His wife, Ellyn, was paid commissions through a company the Athertons co-owned, LLJ Consulting, for brokering tax credits Atherton sold from one client to another, the lawsuits show.

State corporation records show the company was originally Llamajama Wool Productions, which was to sell the products made from llamas they raised on their conservation easement.

Later, Atherton had his own company, Integrity Credits, for tax-credit brokering.

When clients created a conservation easement, Atherton had Noah's Crib assigned as the caretaker in return for a cash donation to manage the preservation.

He even recommended the company that could write the report establishing the quality and condition of an easement. Its owner: Atherton's father, Robert.

Rod Atherton's lawyer, Tamara Westerberg, has refused to comment.

Stanley Mann, a real-estate developer involved with Atherton in land near Walsenburg — now the subject of a lawsuit — said he wondered about the connection when Robert Atherton called him in December 2005.

"I don't remember at what point I knew he was Rod's father, but you are already in the quagmire," Mann said in a deposition. "I don't know what you do then."

Such a simple report — Mann said Rod Atherton described it as "anyone could do it" — was expensive, Mann said.

"As Rod described it, it's the price of this arrangement," Mann said in deposition.

Robert Atherton, a retired lawyer who runs a Christian ministry in Longmont, said the criticisms against his sons are unfounded and unfair.

"There's a lot of misunderstanding; they were raised to do the right thing," the senior Atherton told The Post.

Easement "fundamentally flawed"

Rod Atherton's plan to help his brother would surface years later, as federal and state taxing authorities investigated inflated land values in the easement deals.

The Autumn easement was "abusive and fundamentally flawed," Conservation Resource Center director Michael Strugarwrote in a report reviewing Atherton's deals for those suing him. Strugar set up the practices and protocols for selling tax credits in Colorado.

Wealthy clients who bought into the easement projects and sold the credits were suddenly liable for the federal deductions they took on their own tax returns, as well as the money they were paid when they sold the credits.

Rollins said he's out millions.

Lawsuits percolated from the now-bad investments, each with a dozen or more participants. They include a pair in Elizabeth, where a hunting-club/ vacation-club deal fell apart; the one in Walsenburg; and several others on Colorado's Eastern Plains.

During discovery, lawyers found a two-page e-mail Atherton had sent his brother in April 2005.

"I have special knowledge here — it is knowledge I did not disclose to investors. I had a duty to disclose your rather checkered past to the investors," Atherton wrote.

"I chose to disregard this duty and deal with it the way we did as I knew there was little chance of getting an investor if they knew you had a propensity to steal money," Atherton wrote. "It would not be wise for me to state

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all the things I did ... in order to get Autumn Investment done."

Randall Atherton has no criminal history in Oklahoma, records there show. He did not return messages at his home and office.

It has become the linchpin for the lawsuits against Atherton and the law firms where he brokered easement deals. Each firm was allegedly concerned with his tactics yet unwilling to tell clients about those concerns, according to the complaints.

Attorneys for the law firms either did not return messages or refused to comment.

In his lawsuit, money manager Joseph Michal-ski said had he known about Atherton's brother, he would not have invested.

"Atherton did not advise me that his brother, Randall, had stolen money from Autumn and that Mr. Atherton regarded his brother as a liar and thief," Michalski said in a deposition.

In court, Rod Atherton's attorney, Westerberg, offered only that the e-mail's insinuations about Randall were "inaccurate."

Robert Atherton said it was merely "a brothers' misunderstanding."

"Rod thought Randy had done some criminal activity, and that was not true," he said, refusing to say what occurred.

Millions in damages at stake

Rod Atherton and his former employers could face millions of dollars in damages from the lawsuits against them.

During depositions, Atherton invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. He rescinded it recently when he said investigations into his conduct are unlikely to yield charges, according to lawsuit documents.

He's still practicing, now at ERGO Law.

No lawyer representing any of dozens of plaintiffs and defendants would comment for this story. The first of several trials is expected to begin in late October.

Federal and state authorities neither confirm nor deny that investigations even existed, though sources and Atherton's own statements confirmed them as far back as 2008.

Former appraisers Julie O'Gorman and T. John Stewart were the only casualties in the government's battle to reel in the runaway conservation- easement program. Each was disciplined and later stripped of his or her license, state records show.

Neither is expected to testify.

Stewart could not be reached, though he remains in the Denver area.

O'Gorman, who did not return messages, uses a different last name and coaches high school bowling in rural Alaska. She also runs a home-remodeling business there.

The state official who pursued them, Erin Toll, resigned amid allegations that she misused her authority on an unrelated case.

And what came of Noah's Crib, later renamed Colorado Natural Land Trust?

It's known as Hunting for Purpose and, according to website photos, mentors young adults by sharing the beauty of nature through camping, hunting and fishing.

Its executive director is Rod Atherton.

David Migoya: 303-954-1506, [dmigoya@denverpost.com](mailto:dmigoya@denverpost.com) or [twitter.com/davidmigoya](https://twitter.com/davidmigoya)

Troubles prompt changes

The problems found in Colorado's conservation-easement program resulted in a number of critical changes. Here are a few items of note since 2006:

- Three appraisers lost their licenses.
- Three licenses are pending revocation.
- Three appraisers were barred from conservation easements.
- Nine appraisers were disciplined but kept their licenses.
- More than \$37 million in easement-tax credits were disallowed.
- The state created a Conservation Easement Oversight Commission to review cases.
- Quarterly reports were required to be made to legislators detailing easement activity.
- New law limited the value of easement-tax credits available each year.
- New law created a new method to challenge easement rulings.
- Lawsuits were filed by easement investors seeking redress for disallowed tax credits.

Source: Denver Post research, Colorado Division of Real Estate

## **Auto-pay kiosks replacing cash at Larimer County parks**

*By Pamela Dickman Loveland Reporter-Herald*

*Posted:*

ReporterHerald.com

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ReporterHerald.com

CARTER LAKE — Automated pay stations are replacing the cash and envelope system at all Larimer County parks this week.

So when you pack for an outing at Carter Lake, Hermit Park or Horsetooth Reservoir, bring your plastic instead of paper.

The new “iron rangers” accept only debit and credit cards — something Larimer County officials said went over well during a six-month pilot at Horsetooth Mountain Park.

Larimer County crews installed the automatic pay stations at both sides of Carter Lake, west of Loveland, and at Hermit Park, outside Estes Park, on Monday.

Seven additional units will be installed this week throughout Horsetooth including at Rotary Park and Sunrise Day Use areas and the Blue Sky trailhead.

“Most people come with credit cards now,” said Bob Loomis, seasonal park ranger. “It’s a convenience for our visitors.”

And it will save time for rangers who no longer have to empty the vaults of the old system, count the money and deposit it in the bank.

“There’s a lot of time spent manning the paper system,” said Loomis. “We hope this will allow rangers to get on with more important things.”

Instead, the payment will go directly to the Larimer County bank account through the technology. The systems run off solar panels, a cellular tower and a satellite signal.

The first automated pay station went in at Horsetooth Mountain Park in February near the old cash system, offering residents both options.

By June, the response to the debit and credit card machines was so positive, the county removed the cash option and began planning for the installation of 10 additional units.

Larimer County invested about \$8,000 per machine from the Department of Natural Resources budget into the automated systems. As each one goes in, the old paper envelopes — which would get wet in inclement weather — are going in the trash and the old deposit vaults are being hauled out with a front-end loader.

“We’re getting rid of the stone age,” said Steve McCorkel, maintenance technician who is installing the new technology.

By next week, the transition will be complete.

## Colorado auditor says easement program riddled with problems

By David Migoya *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

State auditors on Tuesday recommended wholesale fixes to shore up Colorado's conservation-easement program, saying it remains riddled with problems including an inability to ensure that donated lands are actually intended for conservation purposes.

In a 107-page report, Auditor Dianne Ray said legislative efforts to stem abuses uncovered in 2007 have worked but are not yet enough to ensure millions of dollars in tax credits are actually valid.

Auditors found several issues including: credits approved without verifying appraisers were licensed; an inability to ensure donations were proper because of poor paperwork; tax credits given despite a lack of appropriate documents.

"The complexity of the credit, as well as the large dollar amount of the credits being claimed, increases the risk of errors, fraud, and abuse occurring and, therefore, increases the need for adequate supervisory or quality control review," auditors wrote.

Land trusts hold more than 900,000 acres in easements, and over a 10-year period since 2000 donors have claimed about \$639 million in tax credits — revenue the state foregoes in order to preserve the land from development.

One fix advocated by auditors and the affected state agencies would be to pre-approve conservation-easement donations — a process already used in 10 states — rather than the current method that reviews them after the fact. In this way, credits can be evaluated properly before they are allowed, auditors said.

"Clearly they are looking strongly toward this pre-approval process," said Greg Yankee, policy director at the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts. "It's a process that uses all the state's expertise."

Many of the audit's findings revolved around fractured communication and divided experience of the three agencies tapped with administering conservation-easement tax credits: the Department of Revenue, and the Department of Regulatory Agencies' Division of Real Estate and its nine-member Conservation Easement Oversight Commission.

Revenue officers ultimately decide if a tax credit is appropriate for a conservation easement, which is intended to compensate individuals who donate their land to protect it from future development.

The agency's tax examiners "do not sufficiently document their reviews of conservation easement tax credit claims and uses," the report says. "More changes need to be made to strengthen the administration (of the program) to ensure that tax credits being claimed and used by taxpayers are valid."

That work is typically done by real estate experts within DORA.

"The difficulty was consultation between revenue with the real estate division and the commission," said John Swartout, former executive director of CCLT and now a consultant. "It was a governmental nightmare."

Agency officials agreed with 12 recommendations for change, saying the bulk of them would be in place by July 2013. Some legislators have said they would advocate quicker fixes by the next session.

[http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci\\_21788062/colorado-auditor-says-easement-program-riddled-problems](http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_21788062/colorado-auditor-says-easement-program-riddled-problems)

David Migoya: 303-954-1506, [dmigoya@denverpost.com](mailto:dmigoya@denverpost.com) or [twitter.com/davidmigoya](https://twitter.com/davidmigoya)

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## Conservation easements draw new scrutiny in state audit

**Sunana Batra** / *Colorado News Agency*

Oct 17th, 2012 [ShareThis](#)



Auditors have found the state's long-debated, often controversial conservation easement program has been eroded by lax oversight, and they recommend new controls to ferret out inconsistencies and add heightened scrutiny.

In findings released Tuesday, the Office of the State Auditor made a dozen recommendations to the Department of Revenue, the Division of Real Estate and the Conservation Easement Oversight Commission, all of which share responsibility for administering the tax credit.

The auditor's report found the Conservation Easement Oversight Commission's tendency to hold appraisals of higher-value parcels of land to a lesser standard problematic. The auditors found the commission was more likely to rubber-stamp deals and approve the tax credit simply because commission members believed "the appraised value seemed reasonable," and particular land "was a great piece of land that would be good to conserve"—rather than applying tax laws consistently regardless of the value of the donation or resulting tax credit.

In one example provided in the audit, tax credits were ultimately denied by the Department of Revenue, which cited irregularities with the very same appraisal the commission found reasonable.

Conservation easements are voluntary, legally binding deals between landowners and the state that keep some parcels of land undeveloped by limiting its use to agricultural or open space, in perpetuity. They were established by law in Colorado in 2000, granting tax credits to struggling farmers and ranchers as an incentive to keep land in agricultural production while the owners retained title to the land. Landowners get substantial state and federal tax breaks as well as reduced real estate property taxes. This was the first time since the program's inception in 2000 it had been audited.

Land trusts and public agencies are often quick to trumpet the agricultural and other unimproved land they add to their portfolios each year, taking the parcels off the market for development. In Colorado, as of 2009, landowners claimed nearly \$640 million in state tax credits for about 3,200 conservation easements while landowners restricted development on about 925,000 acres of land. But land trusts don't always take into consideration the quality of the lands they protect. Not all open space is equally valuable, critics say; easements the state forgoes taxes on are supposed to serve a public benefit.

Auditors found the processes used by the Department of Revenue when reviewing tax credit claims fails to adequately consider the easement's conservation purpose and public benefit. In response, the department acknowledged that assessments of what parcels satisfy a "public benefit" is not under their purview, and they lack the expertise to make that judgment.

The audit found that the Department of Revenue did not heed the conservation purpose associated with a tax credit claim, even though state law lays out specific uses—such as preservation of land for outdoor recreation or protection of fish, wildlife or plant habitats—for a conservation easement donation to qualify for a tax credit. Since conservation easement tax credits reduce the state's tax revenue, the state has no reason to forego revenue for donated easements whose conservation purpose isn't verified against the allowable purposes established by law, auditors pointed out.

The easements are granted to land trusts, whose members sit on the commission. The auditors seemed to be concerned about the effect of such influences on the decision-making process, raising the specter of bias.

"The overall tenor of the CEOC's deliberations and considerations focused much more heavily on the landowner's perspective rather than on its responsibility to taxpayers, which is to ensure tax credits claimed are valid," the auditors state in their findings. They recommended safeguards they say would put some teeth into standards to ensure common understanding and improved communication with the DOR and the DRE.

They recommended the DRE and DOR tighten their reins when it comes to the review process, documenting those reviews and recording tax credit data in a centralized database, as well as certifying conservation easement holders and designing a pre-approval process.

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## **State auditor: Conservation easement program too lax**

The administration of the state's conservation easement tax credit program is in need of a fix, the Office of the State Auditor said Tuesday.

An audit, the agency said, has found problems in several areas of the program, which has been available to individual and corporate taxpayers since 2000.

To help put matters back on track, the auditor's office made 12 recommendations to the Department of Revenue, Division of Real Estate and Conservation Easement Oversight Commission, all of which share responsibility for administering the tax credit.

The audit found that the Department of Revenue's tax examiners do not always sufficiently review tax credit filings, document those reviews or record tax credit data in a centralized database.

For example, tax examiners pay little to no attention to the conservation purpose associated with a tax credit claim, even though state law prescribes specific uses — such as preservation of land for outdoor recreation or protection of fish, wildlife or plant habitats — for a conservation easement donation to qualify for a tax credit.

Regarding appraisals, the audit found that the Division of Real Estate could improve its in-depth reviews of those appraisals to help identify and address problems before a tax credit is claimed. According to the audit, the Division conducted in-depth reviews of only 46 percent of the total 223 tax-credit-generating conservation easement appraisals it has received since July 2008.

Easements promote land conservation. Owners of easements have the right to restrict how the land is used, and landowners may be able to claim a state income tax credit for all or part of a conservation easement they donate to governmental entities or nonprofit organizations.

A tax credit, as distinguished from a tax deduction, is applied after the tax liability is calculated, and it results in a dollar-for-dollar reduction of the tax liability.

Colorado currently allows a maximum credit of \$375,000 per conservation easement donation.

As of 2009, Colorado landowners claimed nearly \$640 million in state tax credits for about 3,200 conservation easements. In return, landowners restricted development rights and other land uses on about 925,000 acres of land.

In 2008, the General Assembly enacted legislation to address possible abuses of tax benefits associated with conservation easements. Before that point, federal and state tax audits had discovered, among other problems, misstatements of appraised land values, which led to landowners claiming inflated conservation easement tax credits.

The full auditor's report is available on the agency's website, <http://www.state.co.us/auditor>

## County earns conservation award for work at Devil's Backbone

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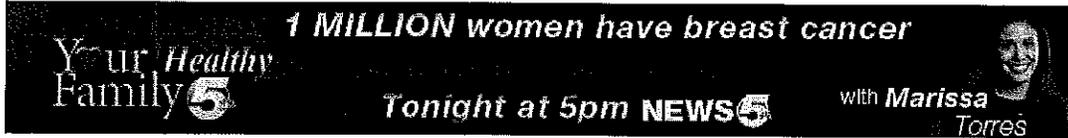
ReporterHerald.com

Devil's Backbone Open Space west of Loveland has earned a "Blue Grama Award" for the Larimer County Natural Resources Department, according to a release issued Wednesday by the county.

The regional Colorado Open Space Alliance Award went for the restoration work through the county's ecological management program. The program focused on reducing cheatgrass, feral rye and other non-native plants in two valleys located at the open space. The valleys had been heavily grazed before the county bought the land, and non-native plant cover was estimated at more than 80 percent, according to the release. Now it's less than 10 percent.

Local agencies involved in the restoration include the Colorado State Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Larimer County Emergency Services, City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, Loveland Fire and Rescue Authority, Poudre Fire Authority, Wellington Fire Protection District, and Berthoud Fire Protection District.

The Blue Grama Award was presented to the Colorado Open Space Alliance Conference in September. It will be displayed in the second floor lobby of the Larimer County Courthouse Office building, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins.



NEWS

## Credit, debit cards only for Larimer County parks

Posted: Oct 16, 2012 6:55 AM by **Garrett Boyd**

LOVELAND, Colo. (AP) - It's no longer cash or credit at Larimer County parks.

Beginning this week, the county is expanding a plastic-only program to Carter Lake, Hermit Park and Horsetooth Reservoir.

Managers say automated kiosks worked so well at Horsetooth Mountain Park, the county will no longer accept bills or coins.

According to the Loveland Reporter-Herald, visitors will be required to buy self-service entrance passes from the kiosks to buy self-service entrance passes from the kiosks.

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## **Devil's Backbone restoration project receives award**

*Written by Coloradoan staff and news services*

*Oct. 09*

coloradoan.com

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Restoration work at Devil's Backbone Open Space has won the Larimer County Natural Resources Department the "Blue Grama Award" from the Colorado Open Space Alliance.

The project reduced the cover of cheatgrass, feral rye and other non-native plants in two valleys located at Devil's Backbone Open Space. The valleys received heavy grazing pressure before Larimer County acquired the land, and non-native plant cover was estimated at more than 80 percent. Now, after four years of prescribed fire followed by herbicide application, the sites, on average, contain less than 10 percent cheatgrass, rye and other weeds.

The project outcomes have been published in the July 2012 issue of Natural Areas Journal and on the Southern Rockies Fire Science Network.

Partners on the project include the Colorado State Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Larimer County Emergency Services, City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, Loveland Fire Department, Poudre Fire Authority, Wellington Fire Protection District and Berthoud Fire Protection District.



the installation of 10 additional units.

The report continues adding that through the use of a cellular tower and a satellite, the system will deposit the money directly into the Larimer County bank account, allowing rangers to focus on important duties other than processing cash fees.

"We're getting rid of the Stone Age," said Steve McCorkel, maintenance technician who is installing the new technology.

The systems should be online at [all parks](#) (<http://larimer.org/naturalresources/parkareas.htm>) by next week.

**Update 10/17 1:09 p.m.:** In response to a comment asking "How are those who don't have a credit or debit card going to be able to visit?", I spoke to Shannon Barnes, with Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. Larimer County parks will still accept cash, however not at the automated pay stations. Barnes says cash should be accepted at all gate houses, visitor centers and via park rangers. However, automated pay stations will be closer to popular trails etc. and visitors wishing to use cash will have to drive to alternate locations to pay.

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SUMSENSE · 7 hours ago

This decision is a poor one and seems prejudicial. There are many like myself who don't think of cash as "stone age" and much prefer NOT putting purchases on credit even though I pay them off each month.

How are those who don't have a credit or debit card going to be able to visit?

There is also the issue of privacy and tracking that extensive use of credit permits -- this is just one more step in that direction whether anyone wants to admit it or not. When and where people go is nobody's business so long as they are not violating any laws or one's personal liberties.

As for me, I'll not be visiting any more Larimer Parks if I have a choice. Plenty of other beautiful counties to see.

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jimi · a day ago

What if you don't use cards? Can you still use the public land?

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**MtnMama** — Congratulations Grace! Great effort and reporting.

## In drilling's way: Ice Age artifacts, rare plants

Preservationists hope to protect prehistoric sites, endangered species



Archeologists discovered artifacts at the Lindenmeier site in 1924. Courtesy CSU

### Steve Lynn

The potential for oil drilling in the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area has caused much hand-wringing over the fate of rare birds and plants. But the 60,000-acre area, just south of the Wyoming border, also is home to a once-bustling Ice Age settlement.

The people who lived there 11,500 years ago — anthropologists call them Folsom, after the town in New Mexico — followed the migrations of bison they hunted around the same time the last Ice Age came to an end.

The prehistoric camp is now known as the Lindenmeier Archeological Site, named after a ranch once owned by William Lindenmeier where amateur archeologists discovered artifacts in 1924.

The largest Folsom settlement in North America, the site today is owned by Fort Collins and Larimer County and remains sacred to Native Americans.

But oil and gas companies such as Anadarko Petroleum Corp. own the mineral rights and hold drilling leases in the area.

The area is seen as potentially less productive than Weld County to the southeast. Nonetheless, it's located in the lucrative Niobrara shale formation in the Denver-Julesburg Basin, which has fed an oil boom that shows no signs of abating.

That's why the Lindenmeier site has become the centerpiece of efforts by a group of city, county and state officials hoping to preserve the area's unique history, as well as plant and animal life.

The Lindenmeier site yielded archeologists a wealth of artifacts, including sharp pieces of stone used to spear bison, thin bone needles for stitching hides as well as beads made of ochre rock believed to have been jewelry.

"It contains some of the oldest jewelry in all of the New World," said Jason LaBelle, an anthropology professor and director of the Center for Mountain and Plains Archaeology. "It just has some unusual things you don't see from the last Ice Age."

Many of the artifacts from the site made their way to the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C., while others have gone to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, said Treloar Bower, curator of education of the Fort Collins Museum.

The site, now considered a National Historic Landmark administered by the National Park Service, has not seen an excavation since 1940.

Experts believe further exploration of the site would yield many more archeological riches.

"Only a fraction was actually excavated in the '30s," Bower said. "The Smithsonian fully intended to continue excavation there, but then World War II happened."

That means artifacts remain buried under portions of the land.

"There's archeological value that could still be there," Bower said. "There's cultural heritage value for the people whose ancestors lived there."

The camp is one of about 300 archeological sites in that corner of the state whose dates range from 13,000 years ago to the 1870s.

An "Energy by Design" plan developed by city, county and state officials as well as The Nature Conservancy seeks to lessen the effects of oil drilling in the area by limiting activity in certain areas.

LaBelle evaluated the significance of the sites keeping in mind that he could not save them all if a company drilled there. If a site is considered historically important, oil companies will be asked to avoid it or have them researched and excavated before drilling can take place there.

Ultimately, the Lindenmeier site's status as a National Historic Landmark does not make it immune to destruction. It would only have to be dug up and catalogued by archaeologists before a rig crew sinks in the drill bit.

But LaBelle doesn't believe that oil drilling will take place there.

"I think people would be very, very upset if people pushed through on a development plan that included Lindenmeier," he said. "I think you would have a lot of protests from a variety of people."

### **Protecting wildlife**

Beyond historical significance, the area also happens to be home to rare plant and wildlife.

The Colorado butterfly plant, which blooms in June and July, has been listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act since 2000.

Soapstone contains the second-largest population of the Colorado butterfly plant, with more than 26,000 plants, said Crystal Strouse, botanist technician for the city of Fort Collins.

Meadow Springs Ranch, another city property where mineral development could occur, had nearly 900 plants last time they were counted.

The plant grows only in Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska. The largest population in the world grows at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyo.

Drilling activities in the wet meadow in Soapstone where the plant grows could harm it, along with the seven other rare plants considered "critically imperiled" by the state, Strouse said.

Despite the Colorado butterfly plant's federal designation as threatened, it has little protection other than what the city has tried to provide it, she said. That means an oil and gas company could potentially build roads and drill on top of the plant.

"The city is hoping that that won't happen, and trying to do everything that we can to make it so that it's not as desirable a place to do just that," she said.

Officials also have concerns about wildlife, which include pronghorn antelope, prairie dogs and swift foxes.

The worry is that drilling could disturb the foxes when they bare their young and care for them in the spring.

Or they could get hit by oilfield traffic on roads built in the open space to service wells, said Chris Metz, land management technician for the city

"I've seen more swift fox dead on the road than alive," Metz said.

### **'Proper' setbacks**

The Energy By Design plan addresses 33 species of wildlife in the area, said Daylan Figgs, the city's natural areas senior environmental planner. In the swift fox's case, the idea is to limit drilling near a den when they have young there.

Other wildlife, such as birds of prey, enjoy protection from the state of Colorado. That means operators would have to follow tighter regulations near golden eagle nests and the winter ranges of pronghorn antelope.

Energy by Design has created a map of nests in the area. The group also aims to protect fish such as the Iowa darter and brassy minnow by identifying where they live in the area.

In many cases, however, Energy by Design can only ask companies to avoid certain areas.

Whether producers decide to follow the group's requests remains to be seen.

"It's a combination of making oil and gas companies aware of those locations and working with them for the proper setbacks," Figgs said.

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# Larimer County receives award for Devil's Backbone restoration project

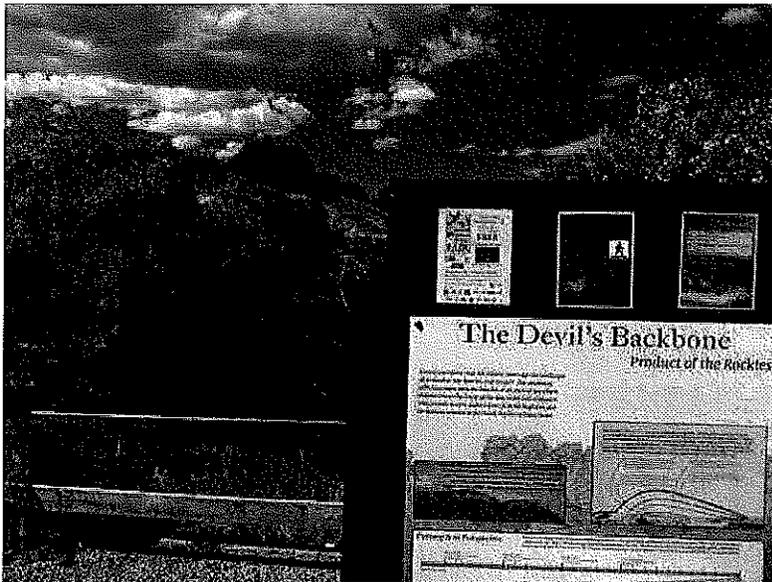
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Restoration work at Devil's Backbone Open Space has won the Larimer County Natural Resources Department the "Blue Grama Award from the Colorado Open Space Alliance.

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The project reduced the cover of cheatgrass, feral rye and other non-native plants in two valleys located at Devil's Backbone Open Space. The valleys received heavy grazing pressure before Larimer County acquired the land, and non-native plant cover was estimated at more than 80 percent. Now, after four years of prescribed fire followed by herbicide application, the sites, on average, contain less than 10 percent cheatgrass, rye and other weeds.

The project outcomes have been published in the July 2012 issue of Natural Areas Journal and on the Southern Rockies Fire Science Network.

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# Larimer County, Windsor seek input on open space projects

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Melissa Chew

Written by Ashley Keesis-Wood

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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.

### Interested?

For more information about "Our Lands – Our Future," visit the website at [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/regionalstudy](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/regionalstudy).

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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."

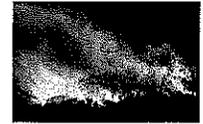
Mailed surveys have already gone out to Larimer County residents,  
and Rollins said they're anxious to get those results back.

"The feedback is very exciting," she said.

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## **Larimer County hires young adults with Great Outdoors Colorado grant to benefit River Bluffs Open Space**

*By Pamela Dickman Loveland Reporter-Herald*

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

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WINDSOR -- About 80 years ago, residents who lived on what is now River Bluffs Open Space planted a row of Siberian elm trees to serve as an apparent wind break.

The trees spread across the land and along the Poudre River, blocking native trees and grasses and clogging habitat for wildlife along the river.

Now, the thick stand of invasive trees is quickly becoming firewood and mulch to make way for native species to return to the riparian corridor, thanks to a Great Outdoors Colorado grant.

The Larimer County Conservation Corp -- one of nine youth corps in the state -- is dedicating two weeks to the task at the behest of the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. The land agency secured a \$19,450 grant to hire the conservation corps for three weeks; one was spent on trails at Horsetooth Mountain Park and this week and next will be dedicated to removing as many elm trees as possible from the open space.

"It's opening up a lot more," Kristy Burt, member of the Conservation Corp, said after a week of hard work removing trees.

"This area was littered with elm trees and not much else could grow. It's great to give the natural species a chance to grow."

Land experts hope native willow, cottonwoods and grasses will return to the area, and that residents will enjoy more open access to the river.

"We're going to give the area a chance to revegetate naturally," Jeffrey Boring, resource specialist with the Department of Natural Resources, said.

"It creates more species diversities, allows more sunlight in, more plants, different kinds of wildlife."

River Bluffs Open Space is 160 acres on County Road 32 just outside of Windsor just east of Interstate 25. The county bought the land in 2004 to preserve prime riparian habitat as well as dryland bluffs and to extend the Poudre River Trail.

Most of the \$1.92 million purchase was covered by Great Outdoors Colorado -- the agency that also is paying the full cost of the current habitat improvements.

Larimer County secured the grant and hired the conservation corps for two reasons -- to benefit the land and the 18- to 24-year-olds that make up the crew.

The conservation corps provides paid jobs, real-life work experience and lessons of conservation to the youth who join. They learn work ethic, conservation lessons, skills, safety and the value of community service, Boring said.

Burt believes the hands-on field work and the skills and knowledge shared by different team members will benefit her in the future as an environmental educator.

[http://www.reporterherald.com/news/larimer-county/ci\\_21653715/conservation-crew-removing-invasive-elm-from-poudre-](http://www.reporterherald.com/news/larimer-county/ci_21653715/conservation-crew-removing-invasive-elm-from-poudre)

"These experiences give you a better background when you teach people," she said.

The Larimer County Conservation Crew has four separate programs that provide work for different age levels, ranging from 14 to 24, at different times of the year. One of those is a fall work crew that has been camping in mountainous areas and removing beetle killed trees and, most recently, thinning elm from River Bluffs.

Matt Holsapfel, crew leader, has enjoyed sharing his knowledge of chainsaws and different cuts, leading a team and seeing the difference to the landscape.

"The progress is amazing," he said. "That's the satisfying part to me."

Pamela Dickman can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 526, or [pdickman@reporter-herald.com](mailto:pdickman@reporter-herald.com). Follow her on Twitter: [@pamelalittlebee](https://twitter.com/pamelalittlebee).

## More Americans answer call of the wild

Sep. 23

coloradoan.com

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### Colorado participation by the numbers

Fishers and hunters: 727,000

Wildlife watchers: 1,456,000

### Colorado outdoors spending by the numbers

Hunting: \$460 million

Fishing: \$648 million

Wildlife watching: \$1.4 billion

### Around the country

- Highest proportion of state residents who hunted: South Dakota, 21 percent
- Highest proportion of state residents who fished: Alaska, 40 percent
- Highest proportion of state residents who watched wildlife: Vermont, 53 percent

### Participation by state

#### In-state hunters

1. Texas – 1,147,000
2. Wisconsin – 895,000
3. New York – 823,000
4. Pennsylvania – 775,000
5. Missouri – 576,000

#### In-state anglers

1. Florida – 3,092,000
2. Texas – 2,246,000
3. New York – 1,882,000
4. Michigan – 1,744,000
5. California – 1,674,000

#### In-state wildlife watchers

1. California – 6,733,000
2. Texas – 4,376,000
3. Florida – 4,308,000
4. New York – 4,239,000
5. Pennsylvania – 3,598,000

Colorado has always had a reputation for being an outdoors haven. The state's reservoirs and rivers are well-stocked with trout and bass, Rocky Mountain National Park boasts thousands of bugling elk, and wild turkey roam Colorado's plains.

Even amid a tough economic climate slicing into our disposable income and numerous distractions competing for our precious recreation time, the outdoors remain an attractive option for Coloradans.

About two million people — 47 percent of Coloradans age 16 and older — participated in hunting, fishing and wildlife-watching activities in 2011, according to the results of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2011 National

## Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

The national survey, recently released by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, shows a significant increase in the number of U.S. hunters and anglers the past five years. Just more than 90 million people, or about 40 percent of all U.S. residents age 16 and older, took part in those outdoors activities in 2011, which is a jump of about 2.6 million participants from the previous study, conducted in 2006.

“Seeing more people fishing, hunting and getting outdoors is great news for America’s economy and conservation heritage,” Salazar said. “It is vital that we continue to support policies and investments that help Americans get outside, learn to fish or go hunting.

“That is why, through President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors initiative, we have been focused on helping Americans rediscover the joys of casting a line, passing along family hunting traditions and protecting the places they love.”

### Economics of the hunt

While Americans are rediscovering that joy of the outdoors, recreation retailers and outfitters have seen more dollars roll in.

Hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers spent \$145 billion last year on related gear, trips and other purchases such as licenses, tags and land leasing or ownerships, according to the 2011 National Survey data. The survey, conducted since 1955, measures participation in outdoors-related spending on trips and equipment across the nation and in individual states.

Colorado boasted nearly \$3 billion in outdoors expenditures in 2011, about half of which went toward fishing and hunting equipment and trips — good news for the incoming Bass Pro Shops coming to the Centerra shopping center in Loveland next year.

“Hunting, fishing and wildlife watching are part of our national heritage, and the trip and equipment-related spending of participants forms significant support for local economies across the country,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe.

About 13.7 million people hunted in 2011, an increase of 9 percent, and they spent about \$34 billion, or an average of about \$2,500 per hunter, on trips, equipment, licenses and other related goods. Hunting equipment spending spiked 29 percent over the previous study.

The number of Americans taking part in fishing increased by 11 percent since the previous study, up to more than 33 million participants. That group spent \$41.8 billion on licenses, trips, equipment and other fishing-related purchases, averaging about \$1,200 per angler.

Eighteen percent of Coloradans fished or hunted in 2011, representing 727,000 people — 567,000 of which were primarily anglers, according to the report. Colorado anglers spent nearly \$650 million in 2011.

### Local outdoors appreciation

While the new state-by-state reports won’t be issued until December, they’re not the only source that notes an uptick in outdoors recreation spending in Colorado.

St. Peter’s Fly Shop, at 202 Remington St. in Old Town Fort Collins, has been owned by Grant Houx’s family for six years and he said he’s seen an increase in people and business every year.

“There seems to be lots of people getting into it. Younger, older, it doesn’t matter,” said Houx, whose shop offers various free clinics and seminars on fly fishing throughout the year. “Maybe it’s just an overall awareness of the outdoors. We have such a wonderful resource here in Colorado. Having kids and getting them outside instead of playing video games is important.”

Houx has seen an increase in the number of younger people interested in fly fishing, something he says is related to a new “coolness” factor.

“The average person in Colorado and outside of Colorado sees skiing and snowboarding as a cool thing to do,” Houx said. “As time has gone on though, at least to me, I think that fly fishing has begun to get this reputation as a cool thing to do. More and more college kids are doing it. It’s one of those things, once you learn the sport, you’re hooked.

“I did a little fly fishing in high school, but it wasn’t until college where I was really introduced to the sport and surrounded by a wonderful area to learn.”

While bringing home food or a trophy holds certain allure for many Americans, even more set out into nature just to see what’s beyond their front doors. More than 71 million Americans engaged in “wildlife watching” in 2011, a figure representing a 2 percent increase in that outdoors activity since 2006.

These individuals take a special interest in wildlife near their homes, according to the report, or travel for the express purpose of viewing wildlife, such as the thousands who come from around the country to observe the elk rut in Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park.

Wildlife watchers include people who maintain bird feeders, those who regularly photograph wildlife, and the 22.5 million people the survey found who took trips to view wildlife. Wildlife watchers spent about \$51 billion on their activities in 2011, including \$1.4 billion in Colorado.

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LARIMER COUNTY VOTERS FACE PLENTY OF CHOICES

## Larimer County Natural Resources wins Colorado Lottery Starburst Community Award

BY NFN ON OCTOBER 1, 2012 IN DISPATCHES, LARIMER COUNTY .  
ADD COMMENT

The Colorado Lottery has awarded a 2012 Starburst Community Award to Larimer County Natural Resources for using Lottery dollars to conduct the Plug in to Nature study. The study was funded with a Lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant of \$115,000.

GOCO funded this project completely as a step towards implementing their strategic plan wherein a goal area stated a need to "increase the involvement of youth and families in all aspects of the GOCO mission." GOCO asked Larimer County to manage this pilot project to establish a process for other communities to follow in order to address the concerning trend in which children are becoming increasingly disconnected from the outdoors.

The study confirmed that families strongly value time in nature and desire to have their children spend more time in nature. Available time, distance and cost were discovered to be the primary impediments to Larimer County youth and families having more significant connections to nature. The study includes recommendations for potential programs, facilities, partnerships and target areas for land conservation.

The Colorado Lottery Starburst Community Awards recognize excellence in the use of Lottery proceeds in community projects implemented to enhance a community's environment.

In Fiscal Year 2012 alone, the Lottery distributed \$123.2 million in proceeds. Since its creation 29 years ago, the Lottery has returned more than \$2.4 billion to the state.

Lottery proceeds are distributed to three primary beneficiaries: GOCO, Conservation Trust Fund and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. These organizations then provide grants and direct funding for parks, recreation, open space acquisition, trails, and wildlife and conservation education.

**You might also like:**

[Noble Erosion Helps High Park Fire Areas](#) | [Larimer County Voters Face Plenty of Choices](#)



Wellington, CO • October 1, 2012

- Nexrad Radar
- Roads
- Night Sky

FEATURED EVENT

Oct. 6 — Nurdy's Southwest Artisan Show featuring many NATIVE AMERICAN crafts and jewelry, plus, art-work from local area artists, and Carol Snow from the Seneca Indian Nation!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- OCT**  
**1**  
Mon

11:00 am Bear Paw Quilters @ RFL Library Stenzel Rm

4:15 pm Wellington Library Friends @ Wellington Public Library

5:45 pm Vinyasa Flow Yoga classes @ Bellvue Grange
- OCT**  
**2**  
Tue

9:00 am Watercolor Society @ RFL Library Stenzel Rm

# North Forty News



CHANNELS

Business Profiles

- Attornies
- Beetle Kill / Weed
- Mitigation
- Cabins / Camping / Getaways
- Car Care / Repair
- Dog training
- Equine
- Equipment
- Rental / Leasing
- Excavation / Earthwork
- Eye Care
- Farm and Ranch
- Garden & Landscaping
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- Therapy
- Mortgages and home loans
- Music
- Instruction
- Pet Care and Products
- Real Estate
- Services
- Restaurants and Cafes
- Restoration
- Services
- Welding / Metal
- Repair

Communities

- Ault
- Bellvue
- Carr
- Crystal Lakes
- Eagle Lake
- Fort Collins
- LaPorte
- Livermore

GRAND COUNTY SAWMILLS FIND SUCCESS IN BEETLE-KILL WOOD MARKETS  
TWEET DIGEST - 09/29 TO 10/05

## Prescribed fires at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area north of Fort Collins

BY NFN ON OCTOBER 8, 2012 IN DISPATCHES · ADD COMMENT

The City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department, in coordination with The Nature Conservancy, will be conducting two prescribed fires at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, weather permitting. The burns are scheduled for October 9-19. The two burns total 715 acres and will take place in the southern portion of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

The purpose of these burns is to use fire to promote habitat for mountain plover, a federally endangered grassland bird. Historic mountain plover nesting sites are within the burn area. The entire natural area will be closed on the day of the burn for the safety of citizens. Please check the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department website, [www.fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas) for the most up to date information for closure details.

Smoke advisory signs will be posted along roads, trails, at the entrance station, and parking lots. A Natural Areas Department representative will inform visitors of the prescribed fire and closures. Officials will closely monitor smoke dispersal to avoid impacts to motorists and residents. To mitigate concerns, the Natural Areas Department will burn only under advantageous conditions.

Concerns or questions regarding this burn can be directed to Rick Bachand (Environmental Program Manager) at 970-416-2183 or the Natural Areas Department at 970-416-2815.

You might also like:



Q: The biggest hurdle for Flaming Gorge pipeline? A: Wyoming



Noosa savors sweet yogurt success



Crash of small plane east of Fort Collins leaves pilot with ...

LinkWithin



Wellington, CO • October 10, 2012

• Nexrad Radar • Roads • Night Sky

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCT 10 Wed  
6:00 pm Candidate Meet & Great – Perry Buck @ The Forks

6:30 pm Pathways Hospice on Our Own @ Pathways Hospice

OCT 11 Thu  
5:45 pm Vinyasa Flow Yoga classes @ Bellvue Grange

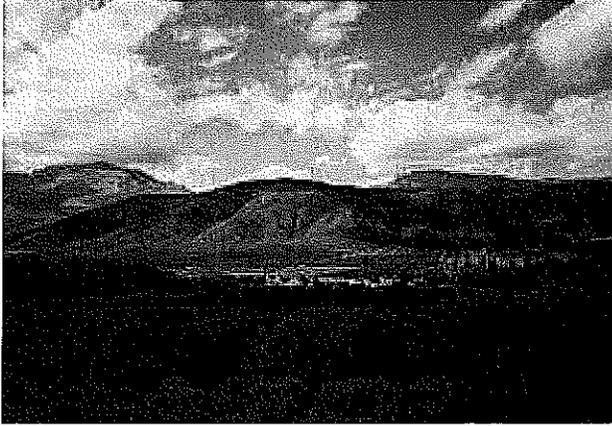
6:00 pm CLVFD Training @ Crystal Lakes @40.847631,-105.835613

6:30 pm Wellington Zumba @ 3Seven12

OCT 12 Fri  
9:00 am Book Groups – Men & Women's @ Red Feather Lakes Community Library

10:00 am Women's Book Group @ RFL Library Stenzel Rm

## Oil hard to find on Soapstone



Oil firms own the mineral rights under some 45,000 acres north of Fort Collins. Courtesy CSU

### Steve Lynn

A group exploring ways to lessen the effects of drilling in open-space areas owned by the city of Fort Collins and Larimer County so far has seen mixed participation from oil and natural-gas companies.

A few representatives of the companies have attended preliminary meetings with members of Energy by Design, the group that is formulating a plan to restrict drilling in some areas of the open spaces south of the Wyoming border in mostly Larimer County. But the companies have not yet engaged in important planning discussions on the matter,

Energy by Design group members said.

The plan being developed by Energy by Design concerns 60,000 acres teeming with rare plants and wildlife. The city and county own surface rights to the land, while the State Land Board owns mineral rights on 15,000 acres. Various private parties own the other mineral rights.

Led by city, county and state officials as well as The Nature Conservancy, Energy by Design's efforts come as the drilling boom in the Niobrara shale formation in the Denver-Julesburg Basin continues.

The open spaces, known as Soapstone, Red Mountain and Meadow Springs, are seen as having less potential for development than areas to the southeast in Weld County, though the oil companies have invested in the area.

Marathon Oil representatives have participated in meetings with Energy by Design, but representatives of Anadarko Petroleum Corp., a major leaseholder in the area, only attended an introductory meeting in November.

"They haven't come to our technical workshops," said Megan Kram, project manager for The Nature Conservancy. "We haven't yet sat down with them, but we are definitely looking to do so."

Kram did not know why the company failed to participate.

Energy by Design is not working to prevent oil and gas development in the areas. Rather, it is seeking to balance energy development while conserving nature, archeological sites, scenery and recreation in the areas.

"By not participating at this point, they could have been building relationships with the city and county that, if and when they want to develop their holdings, it would make things easier for all who are involved," Kram said.

Representatives of Anadarko and Marathon declined to comment.

Daylan Figgs, the city's natural areas senior environmental planner, said Energy by Design will continue to reach out to oil and gas producers to get them involved because it wants to ensure the plan works for them.

Companies have attended some meetings on the nature of the plan, he said. Energy by Design has invited them to other meetings on details of the plan, but “for whatever reasons, they’ve chose not to participate.”

“They have not been involved directly in the planning process, but we have sat down and made them aware of the planning process,” he said.

Figgs said he was confident that producers will come to an understanding about the importance of Energy by Design’s work and will eventually decide to work with the organization.

# Our Lands, Our Future

11:38 AM, Oct 11, 2012

Written by

**Beacon staff**

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.

Our Lands, Our Future will guide how future Larimer County open space tax dollars (generated from sales tax) may be spent and will include a citizen survey, extensive public outreach, interactive mapping of open space opportunities and an economic cost-benefit analysis, all designed to assist future planning efforts. It will also provide valuable information to the Town of Windsor.

If residents have already received a survey, please complete and return it as soon as possible. Windsor residents in both Larimer and Weld counties have been randomly selected to be part of a statistically valid sample, and input is needed.

If residents did not receive a survey but would like to share thoughts and ideas, town staff would welcome that. Although not part of the statistical sample, residents' thoughts still matter. Please visit: [http://larimer.org/ourlands\\_ourfuture/](http://larimer.org/ourlands_ourfuture/) or contact Zac Wiebe at [zwiebe@larimer.org](mailto:zwiebe@larimer.org).

## **State honors Larimer County for ecological work at Devil's Backbone**

*By Pamela Dickman Loveland Reporter-Herald*

*Posted:*

ReporterHerald.com

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ReporterHerald.com

LOVELAND — Larimer County received a state award for its four-year effort to reduce invasive grasses and vegetation at Devil's Backbone Open Space.

The Colorado Open Space Alliance honored the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources with its Blue Grama Award for ecological management.

County staff used herbicide and prescribed fire to remove non-native grasses from two valleys around the open space. The valleys had been heavily grazed in the past and contained more than 80 percent of non-native grasses, including cheatgrass, rye and other weeds, when the project began.

Now, the two sites have an average of less than 10 percent.



T.M. Fasano

[tfasano@mywindsornow.com](mailto:tfasano@mywindsornow.com)

September 18, 2012

## **Windsor partners with other Larimer County towns and cities for open space and natural areas study**

The town of Windsor's Parks, Recreation and Culture Department had become partners with other northern Colorado towns and cities in Larimer County that will recognize the future of open space and natural areas in the region.

"In a collaborative project to identify community needs and desires associated with natural areas and outdoor recreation, the town of Windsor is a partner and contributor to the study, participating on a core team, as well as having representatives on the advisory team," said Melissa Chew, director of Windsor Parks, Recreation and Culture. "Larimer County is looking for it to provide direction on the future of open space and natural areas, not only in terms of how they direct the funding that they have, but updating their master plan."

The study is called Our Lands, Our Future.

According to Larimer County's Natural Resources Department, it's an effort unprecedented in Colorado, and all Larimer County municipalities are joining together with the department to evaluate the achievements, opportunities and possible gaps in the region's land conservation, open space and outdoor recreation programs. The study is a grassroots effort to generate a vision for the critical landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities of northern Colorado.

Partnering with Windsor are the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, and towns of Berthoud, Estes Park, Johnstown, Timnath and Wellington.

"It's exciting not only for the results, but to have that kind of regional collaboration is really great," Chew said.

According to the Larimer Natural Resources Department, Our Lands, Our Future is partially funded by a grant from Great Outdoors Colorado, and will be completed over 8-10 months by local consultant Logan Simpson Design. Components of Our Lands, Our Future will include a citizen survey, extensive public outreach, comprehensive mapping of local landscapes and an economic analysis, all designed to assist future planning efforts.

"The partnership certainly made the grant application stronger, so this is also funded, in part, by a grant and we are a financial contributor to the effort partly because of that grant," Chew said. "Part of Larimer County's effort in gathering data is a statistical valid survey. As a financial contributor, one of the things we asked Larimer County for is if they would make that survey statistically valid for

Windsor as well as statistically valid for Larimer County, which means that we have some residents from Weld County that live in Windsor that will participate in Windsor's portion of the survey but their answers will not be counted into the Larimer County statistically valid side."

It cost \$500 for Windsor to participate.

"For a \$500 contribution, Windsor walks away with a statistically valid survey that gives us some feedback on what our residents like to experience in terms of outdoor recreation, what they like to experience in terms of trail heads," Chew said. "That's information that we can use as we build our collaborative partnerships with Larimer County, with the Poudre River Trail Corridor Board, with Greeley, the Great Western Trail Authority and different things like that."

Chew said this is the first time Windsor has collaborated regionally with other towns and cities at the parks and recreation level.

"It's a real kudos for northern Colorado that you have that kind of regional collaboration," Chew said.

A formal kick-off event for Our Lands, Our Future was held Wednesday night in Fort Collins. The public who attended had an opportunity to receive information, meet with local conservation professionals, complete a survey and provide feedback.

The survey is available online at: <http://survey.rrcresearch.com/s3/larimer2>. For more information, visit: [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/regionalstudy](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/regionalstudy) or contact Zac Wiebe at [zwiebe@larimer.org](mailto:zwiebe@larimer.org).

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