

Drought, wildfires bring water challenges to area

Worries over the long-term health of Fort Collins' water sources continue in the wake of 2012 disasters.

By Bobby Magill

BobbyMagill@coloradoan.com

GREELEY — Northern Colorado's drought shows no significant signs of abating, and that, coupled with ongoing pollution from the High Park Fire washing into the Poudre River, has water officials worried for the future of Fort Collins' and Greeley's water supply.

Experts from around the region painted an uncertain picture of the area's water future Wednesday morning at Northern Water's fall water user's meeting in Greeley.

As ash and silt continue their relentless descent into the Poudre River during even tiny rainstorms, Fort Collins will have to spend much more money on water filtration and purification in the coming years and potentially treat drinking water with additional chemicals to ensure the muck stays away from your faucet, Fort Collins water production manager Lisa Voytko said.

The silt washing into Seaman Reservoir from the Hewlett and High Park wildfire burn areas could be costly to Greeley, said Jon Monson, the city's water and sewer director.

"It costs 10 times more to clean out a reservoir than to build a new one," he said, showing a picture of massive sediment deposits that washed off nearby slopes and into the reservoir during the summer. Voytko said she's worried about spiking levels of total organic carbon in Poudre River water every time it rains. That's because the carbon has to be removed with chlorine, a process that creates potentially toxic byproducts in

See WATER, Page A2

Article Continued Below

[See WATER on Page A02](#)

Water

Continued from Page A1

drinking water that have to be removed at great expense. Polymers have to be used to remove the turbidity from the drinking water, and it's expensive to dispose of the byproducts of that process, she said.

"What we're looking at long-term, we're not really sure," she said.

The summer's wildfires have clogged Fort Collins' water intake structures on the Poudre River with sediment and debris, reducing their intake capacity.

The sediment washing off the burn areas is so extreme that the city had to flush out its intake structures four times in September. Normally, the city flushes them once a year.

Then there's a concern all the silt and muck in the Poudre River and Seaman Reservoir could cause major algae blooms, further degrading the water quality and treatment expense, Voytko said.

Fort Collins is working with Greeley, Colorado State University, the federal government and other agencies to find ways the city can treat all potential pollutants in Poudre River water.

The drought only complicates matters, she said.

The city would prefer to use mostly Poudre water for its drinking water supply but has been relying on Horsetooth Reservoir water since the Hewlett Fire last May. With continued drought sullyng the mountain snowpack and reducing the amount of water that can be pumped into Horsetooth Reservoir, the city may have to rely more on the fire-polluted Poudre, forcing it to find better ways to treat the river water.

"We have to find a way to preserve our water supply by finding ways to take this (Poudre River water) treatment," Voytko said.

Fort Collins is working with Greeley and other water providers to treat the slopes on thousands of acres of private land in the Poudre's watershed with mulch to prevent as much silt and ash runoff as possible, Monson said.

"The phrase, 'no good crisis should be wasted' comes to mind here," he said. "The coalitions we're building (with other cities, counties, conservation groups and water providers) are really heartwarming."

Follow reporter Bobby Magill at [facebook.com/bobbymagill](https://www.facebook.com/bobbymagill) and twitter.com/bobbymagill.

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Voters approve Longmont fracking ban

By The Associated Press

LONGMONT — Longmont voters approved a ban on oil and gas fracking and the storage of fracking waste in city limits.

Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” is a process used by oil and gas drillers to crack rock deep below ground. Supporters of the ban say the practice is environmentally risky. Opponents say the measure will bring lawsuits over regulation of mineral rights.

According to the Longmont Times-Call, state law allows cities to set standards on how and where drilling operations are conducted, but not a total ban.

November 8, 2012
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11/08/2012 3:21 pm

Study eyes bark beetle impact

Forest Service research shows that the Colorado infestation is creating more biologically diverse forests. By Bobby Magill

BobbyMagill@coloradoan.com

Bark beetles driven by drought may be leaving millions of dead trees behind, but they may also leave behind more diverse, complex and healthy forests than Northern Colorado has seen in more than a century.

A U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station study published in October concludes that Colorado's bark beetle infestation is creating more biologically diverse forests than exist today and the idea that beetles are killing forests just isn't true.

Dense pine forests composed almost entirely of mature lodgepole pine trees have been hit the hardest by the beetles, which were able to spread through those homogeneous forests because drought stressed the mature trees and warmer temperatures allowed the beetles to survive the winter, the study says.

What's left behind are entire hillsides of dead trees. Growing up among them is a diverse array of trees that couldn't grow there before, including aspen, subalpine fir and young lodgepoles, the Forest Service concludes.

When the regenerated forest matures, lodgepoles won't dominate the landscape anymore, but subalpine fir trees will as part of a forest composed of more kinds of trees and plants than those that existed before the beetles took over.

In the long run, the diverse forest may resist major new bark beetle epidemics and turn out to be a bonanza for lynx, spotted owls and other wildlife that depend on a forest full of many different kinds of trees.

A separate University of Colorado study announced Monday shows for the first time that the pine beetle epidemic currently afflicting Northern Colorado's forests was accelerated by drought, especially in 2001-02.

The study, co-authored by CU-Boulder doctoral student Teresa Chapman, suggests that the beetle epidemic began in separate low-elevation lodgepole pine stands throughout the region in the 1990s. But the 2001-02 drought triggered a massive rise in beetle populations on the Western Slope and eventually propelled them over the Continental Divide to Front Range ponderosa pine forests.

The beetle epidemic was influenced by large forest fires that burned in Colorado's mountains between 1850 and 1890, allowing dense stands of lodgepole pines all of about the same age to grow in the burned areas.

Those trees, Chapman said, are easy targets for bark beetles.

The Forest Service's study, "From Death Comes Life: Recovery and Revolution in the Wake of Epidemic Outbreaks of Mountain Pine Beetle," was published in October in the Rocky Mountain Research Station's "Science You Can Use Bulletin."

Chapman's study was published in October in the journal "Ecology."

Follow reporter Bobby Magill at [facebook.com/bobbymagill](https://www.facebook.com/bobbymagill) and twitter.com/bobbymagill.

NoCo50

NEXT WEEK'S CHALLENGE

HIKE THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

The Challenge: Sure, the weather forecast calls for it to be a bit chilly this weekend, but we still feel it is time to get back out on a trail. NoCo50 Challenge No. 44 is to hike the Devil's Backbone Trail in Loveland.

According to the Larimer County Parks website, the nearly 2,200-acre Devil's Backbone Open Space is located off Hidden Valley Drive, approximately two miles west of the intersection of Wilson Avenue and Eisenhower Boulevard in Loveland. The trail is 7 miles long, round trip, and unpaved.

"The Backbone Trail loop (3.5 miles) has marked stops that coordinate with an interpretive brochure," according to the website.

Hike with Scott and Sadie: We are planning on hitting the Backbone Trail loop at noon Sunday. Join us.

The Devil's Backbone Trail provides great views of the Rocky Mountains and the foothills. Near the trail's end there is a resting spot inside of a giant keyhole. Or so we have been told.

This will be our first time tackling one of Larimer County's most popular trails, so it is all hearsay to us.

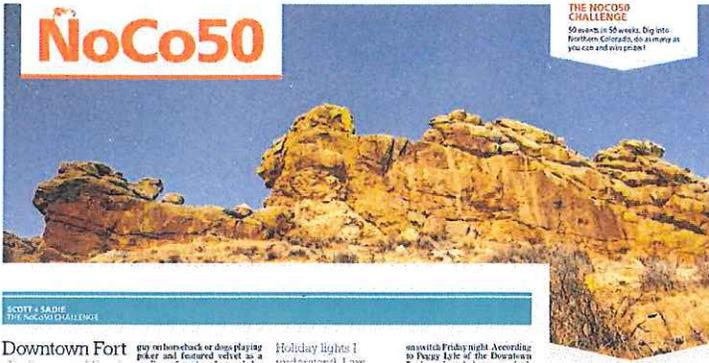
The trail is listed as easy to moderate, so it should be just perfect for the beginning hiker, which decries us.

The trail is open to hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding.

"The trailhead at Devil's Backbone features restroom facilities, drinking water, horse-trailer parking and a picnic area," according to the Larimer County Parks website. **SEND US YOUR PHOTOS**

If you choose to accept our challenge, post your photos and experiences online at [Facebook.com/NoCo50](https://www.facebook.com/NoCo50) by Nov. 13 and we may use them in next week's column. We adore your feedback about NoCo50 and ask that you keep it coming to the Facebook page or send them via email to Scott@BigCountry979.com.

UPCOMING CHALLENGE » Challenge 45: Run/walk the Fort Collins Thanksgiving Day Run



THE NOCO50 CHALLENGE

50 events in 50 weeks. Dig into Northern Colorado, do as many as you can and win prizes!



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SCOTT + SADIE

THE NoCo50 CHALLENGE

On a chilly autumn day, devil's hiking with you

I am a procrastinator. Ask my editor. I am unsure why I procrastinate, I just do. I am certain there are hoards of psychological reasons why my fellow procrastinators and I put stuff off. Someday, I will get around to reading that report. For better or for worse, stretching deadlines is just part of who I am.

It is ironic that I still procrastinate because I have stockpiles of examples of why this is not a good practice. Add NoCo50 Challenge No. 44 — Hiking Devil's Backbone — to that educational list.

We issued the challenge on Thursday; a day that boasted sunshine and highs in the upper 50s. I had a couple hours available Thursday but had other pressing issues and deadlines, like taking a nap, to which I needed to attend.

I also had time available on Friday; an even more perfect fall day with highs in the low 60s. Alas, it was Friday, and I had a demanding engagement at a happy hour somewhere. Saturday I had to moonlight as the stadium voice for the Roosevelt Rough Riders — during a pretty decent snowstorm — so that didn't work.

So my procrastination pushed me to Sunday, a day offering sunshine and temperatures mingling in the upper 20s. It was also breezy. Procrastination never pays. At least the trail will be empty I reasoned. I was wrong on that assumption, too. I was surprised just how busy the trail was on a brisk Sunday in the middle of the Broncos game.

I wondered if these coldweather hikers were related to the cold-weather joggers I often observe. You have undoubtedly spotted them. When Colorado serves up a perfect day of sunshine and 75 degrees, these outdoor amblers are nowhere to be found. However, drop that temperature by 50 degrees and add some snow to the mix and suddenly everyone is on the streets adorned in Under Armour, cross trainers and a smile.

Not me. Even with the bulk of the NoCo50 Challenges behind us, I remain committed to only physically exerting myself in Colorado's great outdoors when the temperature ranges from 60 to 80 degrees. If the weather varies outside, I prefer my climate controlled. That is why Sunday I felt my old pal procrastination had dealt me an unfair hand. The temperature was below freezing and I was about to attempt a 7.5mile jaunt on the west side of Loveland in the foothills where it is always colder.

Devil deserving of your time

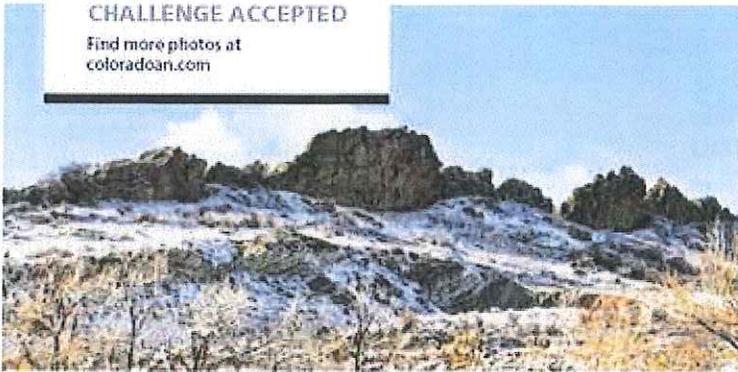
We arrived at the Devil's Backbone Trailhead at 12:30 p.m. The bright sunshine was deceptive. With the wind chill, the temperature was in the upper teens and I was fresh out of clean Under Armour. My Carhartt coat would have to do.

See NOCO50, Page C3

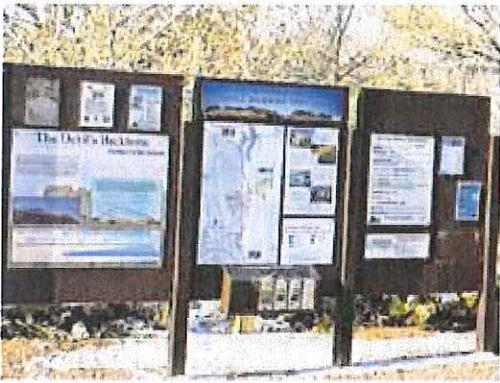
(Devil's Backbone) is perhaps the most impressive visible part of a geologic formation that stretches north through the Horsetooth area on up to the state line ...

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Find more photos at coloradoan.com



The Devil's Backbone Open Space's signature landmark is the rock spine that winds along the ridge top. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT JAMES



The Devil's Backbone Open Space offers more than 12 miles of family-friendly trails.



Article Continued Below

[See NOCO50 on Page C03](#)

NoCo50

Continued from Page C1

Past conversations with Gary Buffington, director of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, have indicated the Devil's Backbone is among Larimer County's most popular trails.

My wife and 6-year-old son accompanied me on this challenge and they came better prepared. I forgot a hat.

As Jack and Julie bundled up in the parking lot, I immediately found two hikers finishing their journey and asked if they were insane.

Ginny Hernandez, Colleen Vera and Tuffy, the smartly sweated Lhasa Apso, all of Loveland, seemed unaffected by the cold and wind.

"We love this trail and this time of the year," Ginny said. "We like taking Tuffy on walks while the boys sit in the basement watching football." Both women laughed at that statement. I was confident their chuckle was brought on by hypothermia-induced delusion. You realize it is below freezing?

"This is Colorado," Vera said. "The sun is out and it is a beautiful day. If you wear the right clothes and get moving, you won't even notice the cold. Just wait, you'll see."

She was right. I needed to get moving; to get my blood pumping. That would warm me up.

I thanked these two kind ladies for their time, noticing they had on a winter wardrobe that would cost me a car payment, zipped my trusty Carhartt coat and made way for the trailhead.

Covered in snow or otherwise, the Devil's Backbone truly is a beautiful place. It is perhaps the most impressive visible part of a geologic formation that stretches north through the Horsetooth area on up to the state line and south for many miles.

Playing home to a wide variety of wildlife and plant species, the 2,198-acre Devil's Backbone Open Space boasts 12 miles of trails that connect to the Rimrock Open Space and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Thousands use this unique outdoor area annually for hiking, running, horseback riding, mountain biking, wildlife viewing and just hanging out in NoCo's great outdoors.

Leave it to me to take my family for the first time to the Devil's Backbone on a day I am certain will be remembered in history as the start of a new Ice Age.

That is what I get for procrastinating.

The family dutifully hit the trail, taking in the natural beauty of the open space and its fresh blanket of snow. Jack was particularly interested in the evidence pointing to frequent equestrian use of the trail. Move along, son.

Feeling much like Clark W. Griswold in one of the "Vacation" movies, I dragged my now-freezing family just far enough to see The Keyhole, a unique rock formation in the Devil's Backbone that looks like, well, a keyhole.

"Son, that is the Keyhole," I proclaimed triumphantly.

"Who made it," Jack inquired.

"God," I answered.

"What's it made out of," Jack asked almost half-interested.

"Rock," I answered.

"That's nice, Daddy, can we go to the car?"

What is he complaining about, he had a hat. I have trained him well.

No, we did not make the entire 7.5 miles of the Devil's Backbone Trail. We got cold. So can we claim we actually completed NoCo50 Challenge No. 44? After completing most of the NoCo50 I have developed a hike multiplier. For every degree outside, my optimal 60- to 80-degree temperature range, you may multiply the distance actually traveled by 1.5. The difference between 28 degrees and 60 degrees is 32. Thirty-two multiplied by 1.5 is 48. Forty-eight multiplied by our hike distance of 2.4 miles is 115.2.

We completed the challenge 16.46 times. But who is counting? That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Scott and Sadie are the morning hosts of Big Country 97.9 FM. Listen weekdays from 5 to 10 a.m.

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Boulder County buying Larimer County land

*By John Fryar For the Reporter-Herald Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:*

ReporterHerald.com

BOULDER -- Boulder County commissioners decided last week to buy

17.5 acres of land in Larimer County that Boulder County has been leasing for a community forestry sort yard.

The county will spend \$284,000 on the property near Meeker Park -- land that lies just north of the Boulder-Larimer county line and east of Colorado 7 on the Peak to Peak Highway -- under a transaction Boulder County's commissioners approved Thursday.

The current owners, Charles and Grace Page, have been leasing the land to Boulder County since 2008 for the Allenspark Area Sort Yard, also known as the Meeker Park Community Forestry Sort Yard. There, landowners from northwest Boulder and southern Larimer counties can drop off, at no charge, logs and slash they've removed from their private properties.

Jim Daus, a member of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department's acquisition staff, said the county has been paying the Pages about \$1,000 a month, during months the sort yard is open.

Daus told Boulder County commissioners that the Pages have notified the county that they might not be able to renew that lease in coming years.

Daus said the Boulder County staff is recommending the purchase because the Page property "has proven to be an excellent site" for a sort yard, where its dropped-off materials are sorted into slash and usable wood. He said virtually all of that slash and wood is redirected to productive or commercial uses, such as converting it to mulch, compost and biomass fuels.

"It would be very difficult to locate a substitute property," Daus said in a memo. "The price is reasonable and potentially a bargain compared to what other landowners might ask for similarly scarce land appropriate for such an intensive use."

While no one spoke at Thursday's public hearing on the proposed acquisition, commissioners got a letter from Raymond resident William Ellis, who questioned whether other potential sites for a sort yard had been researched.

Ellis suggested that the county staff "is taking the easy way out in spending the taxpayers money" and said the commissioners should table the proposed purchase "until other options for locating and establishing a county sort yard can be demonstrated to be nonviable.

"Ellis wrote that the current sort yard is not centrally located for northwest Boulder County property owners in the Allenspark region, but Daus said landowners appreciate the facility because they would otherwise have to burn or chip the wood on their own properties.

"Burning can have drastic consequences if the fire gets out of hand, and improper distribution of chips easily causes other unintended forest-health consequences," Daus wrote the Board of County Commissioners.

Property owners dropped off more than 3,000 loads at the Allenspark Sort Yard in 2012, Daus said, amounting to 1,853 tons of wood. It operated from May 1 through July 7 and also was open on a limited fall schedule.

**JIM SMITH AND SAM MAMET
SOAPBOX: GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO**

20 years later: a voter decision that continues to benefit Colorado



Every election cycle, amid the onslaught of campaigning, voters get a crash course on ballot issues before them. However, they might never have a clear sense of the impact of their decisions that could potentially play out for decades.



Twenty years ago, 58 percent of voters approved the Great Outdoors Colorado, or GOCO, ballot issue. In the days after the vote, its significance was eclipsed by the passage of other, more controversial measures. Despite its relatively low profile, however, GOCO has made an indelible mark on Colorado.

The GOCO amendment made Colorado the only state in the nation to dedicate virtually all lottery proceeds to its outdoors. As a result, GOCO invests a portion of lottery dollars to enhance the state's wildlife,

park, river, trail and open space heritage, and in doing so, helps preserve natural resources we all value and produce benefits we all enjoy.

The outdoors is a key component of Colorado's identity, vitality and economic strength. In the past 20 years, citizens have benefited from more than 3,400 projects in all 64 counties achieved with the help of lottery funds from GOCO.

The most lasting of these projects is the land that has been preserved in perpetuity — along river corridors, urban parcels, agricultural land and wildlife habitat. However, projects also include new state parks and improvements to existing state parks, the first playgrounds for many small communities, miles of trails and jobs through the Colorado Youth Corps Association.

Throughout Larimer County, citizens benefit from projects daily that would have taken much longer to complete or would remain unfinished if not for GOCO funding. These include extensive trails along the Poudre River and spectacular parks and open spaces like Hermit Park Open Space, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space and Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Park that serve thousands of outdoor enthusiasts annually.

GOCO funds also have helped build ball fields, playgrounds and skate parks throughout the county and have made substantial enhancements to Boyd Lake State Park.

These are a few examples of the work of local governments, land trusts and Colorado Parks and Wildlife that is not complete. As the population continues to grow, so does pressure on our lands and resources.

Demand for projects still far exceeds the funding GOCO is able to provide. The Colorado Lottery remains about the only state funding source for our outdoor needs with no state tax revenues going toward them, something that is unlikely to change.

We need to provide the opportunity for all Coloradans to benefit from outdoor resources close to home. The growing trend of both adult and childhood obesity makes this paramount. Offering playgrounds, parks and trails to Colorado's kids and families will help improve their health and wellness. GOCO plays an important role in that.

The outdoors we love are the lynchpin in our economic health, both through the dollars people spend when they visit or through the edge our natural beauty and outdoor recreation amenities give us when competing for business and industry.

In 20 years, GOCO has made a hugely positive impact on Colorado. But considering the need, it amounts to just a good start.

Jim Smith is chairman of the Great Outdoors Colorado board, and Sam Mamet is executive director of the Colorado Municipal League.

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Briefs: Larimer County parks permits going on sale

10:43 PM, Nov 21, 2012 | Comments

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The 2013 Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' annual entrance permits will be available for purchase starting Dec. 3.

The permits allow use of parks and open spaces managed by Larimer County, including Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Hermit Park Open Space, Horsetooth Reservoir, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Pinewood Reservoir and Ramsay-Shockey Open Space.

Here are the major changes from year's past with this year's annual permits:

- Permits good for a year from month of purchase

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- Permits are transferable among vehicles registered to the same household

- A combined vehicle and boat trailer permit (one permit per trailer, not per boat) is now available

- No additional permit is required for non-trailer vessels, such as canoes, kayaks, belly boats, which are carried on or in a vehicle.

Permits are \$75 per vehicle for Larimer County residents and \$95 for nonresidents and \$150 for vehicle and boat trailer for residents and \$190 for nonresidents.

The cost for seniors ages 65 and older is \$45 per vehicle and \$120 for vehicle and boat trailer and \$10 for those with disabilities for a vehicle and \$85 for vehicle and boat trailer.

Permits are available online at www.larimer.org/naturalresources or at Larimer County Natural Resources Administrative Offices north of Carter Lake, 1800 S.County Road 31, Loveland; Citizen Information Center at the Courthouse Offices Building, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins and at local businesses listed at www.larimer.org/naturalresources/retail_outlets.htm

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Larimer County may outlaw panning for gold on county property

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

When gold was discovered in Colorado in 1859, fortune seekers flocked to the state in hopes of striking it rich.

More than 150 years later, mining is still an important part of the state economy, and searching rivers and creeks for shining bits of fortune is a pastime shared by many amateurs with pans or gas-powered sluices and dredges.

But, if the Larimer County commissioners sign off on recommended rule changes, panning for gold will no longer be allowed in waters located on any Department of Natural Resources property, including Glade Park and River Bluffs Open Space.

The Larimer County Parks Advisory Board has recommended the county add "minerals" to the list of what cannot be removed, collected or destroyed, joining vegetation, signs, fences and buildings.

The proposed change is in response to an influx in gold panners, said Dan Rieves, visitor services director for the Department of Natural Resources. The county does not have specific numbers, but Rieves said rangers have contacted more and more people seeking gold in rivers and creeks that run through the county open spaces and parks.

"On several sites, we don't own the mineral rights," Rieves added.

Larimer County is not rich in gold to be found, but residents should have the right to look, said Darrell Koleber, a Loveland resident who demonstrates the skill throughout the community as a member of the Rocky Mountain Prospectors and Treasure Hunters Club.

"I think they're sticking their nose in one of the few things we can go out and do and have fun and not spend a lot of money," said Koleber.

"Gold was what opened up the state."

Rieves said rangers have contacted hopefuls at Glade Park and on other county properties and asked them to stop panning for gold. They weren't likely to find any, though.

"There is no gold in the Big Thompson" said Koleber. "That's the only river in Larimer County that doesn't have gold."

Regulations for where people can pan by hand or with small motorized equipment vary depending on the type and size of the operation and the location and whether it is private, local, state or federal land, including national forest sites.

Larimer County does not have any rules on the books yet, but the proposed restriction is expected to go to the county commissioners in December.

Boulder does not allow recreational prospecting in city or county parks.

Rocky Mountain National Park prohibits panning for gold, and because the Poudre River is designated a Wild and Scenic River, gold panning is prohibited.

However, Jefferson County recently opened to prospecting an open space west of Golden, Koleber said.

Private-property owners can allow prospectors onto their land. One of the prime gold-seeking spots, Koleber said, is where a business owner allows hobbyists to search Clear Creek as it crosses his property in the Denver area.

The discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859 launched the state's mining industry, which, according to the Colorado Mining Association, employs 5,000 people and pumps millions into the economy.

The most productive Colorado gold mine, located west of Colorado Springs, harvested 258,000 ounces of the mineral in 2008, according to the mining association website.

While some operations are big business, most hobbyists are in it for the thrill.

"It's just a way to spend time in the outdoors," said Rick Mattingly, one of three coordinators for the Rocky Mountain Prospecting and Treasure Hunters Club.

"No one does it to make a living. It's just the joy of the hunt."

Added Koleber, "Where else can an adult go up and play in the water? You're not going to get wealthy doing it. It probably won't even pay the gas money."

But, just like 153 years ago, there are still dreams and, sometimes, a big treasure.

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

Larimer County May Outlaw Panning Gold



By Susan Moore Yesterday

The thought of prospecting conjures up Yosemite Sam. Who knew panning for gold is still a popular past time for many people in Colorado? Larimer County is considering outlawing the panning of gold on county property. Larimer County commissioners could sign off on the recommended rule changes.



Flickr

Then, panning for gold will no longer be allowed in waters located on any Department of Natural Resources property, including Glade Park and River Bluffs Open Space. According to the Loveland Reporter Herald: The Larimer County Parks Advisory Board has recommended the county add "minerals" to the list of what cannot be removed, collected or destroyed. Vegetation, signs, fences and buildings are already on that list.

Reporter Herald

Colorado Mining History

MailOnline

Gold Rush fever in Colorado town prompts call for panning ban

- **Larimer County officials to vote next week to ban taking minerals from county land**
Digging for gold has become popular pastime for residents, despite relatively low pay-off

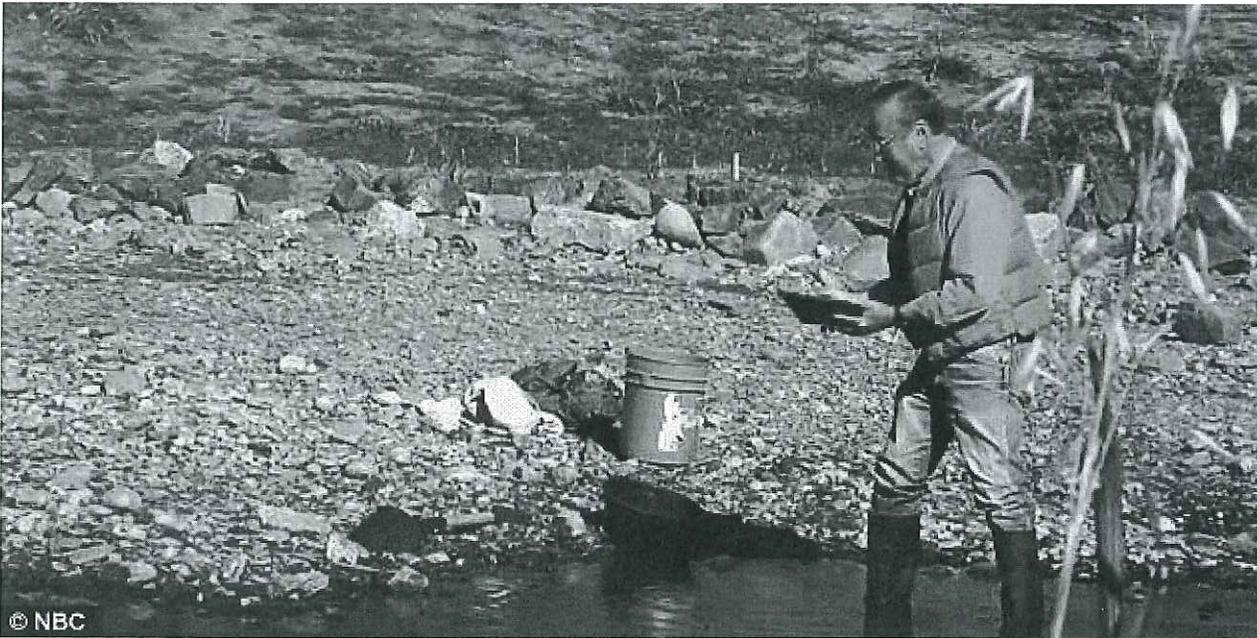
By [Beth Stebner](#)

PUBLISHED: 15:00 EST, 27 November 2012 | **UPDATED:** 15:36 EST, 27 November 2012

Though panning for gold might seem like an outdated activity better suited for the rough-and-tumble prospectors of the 19th century, that hasn't stopped hundreds of people from sifting through gravel and silt, in hopes of striking gold.

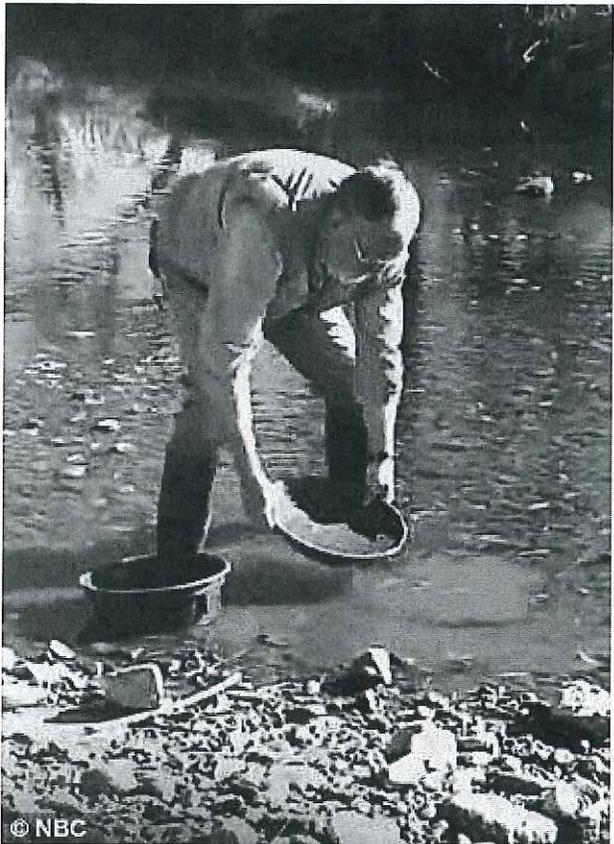
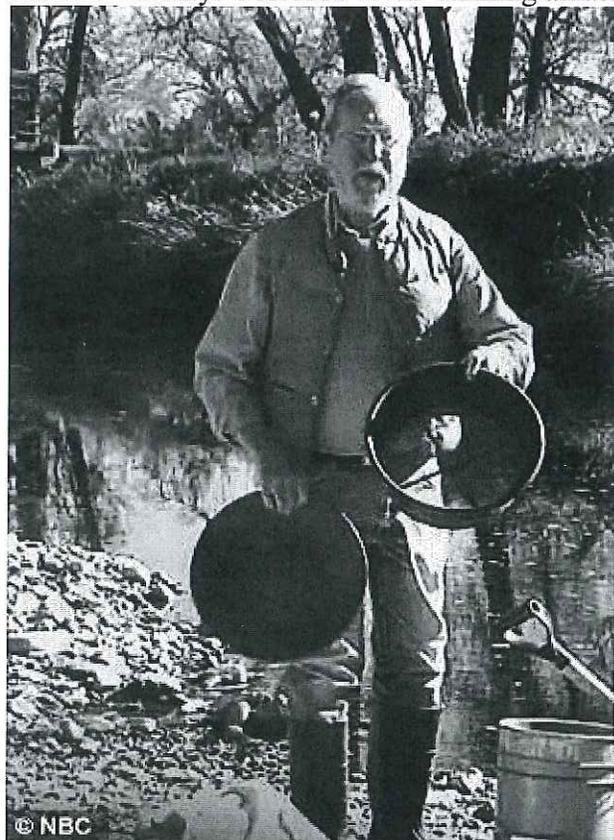
But in Colorado, residents who have been prospecting through the state's rivers and creeks for gold dust could be in for an unfavorable change.

Lawmakers are considering a ban on harvesting of the precious mineral.



© NBC

Forbidden: Colorado lawmakers are considering a ban on harvesting of gold on city land along with other minerals



Hard day's work: Hours of scooping and sifting often yielded no more than \$20 worth of gold dust

Gold panning has experienced a spike in popularity in part because of shows like 'Gold Rush' on the Discovery Channel, which depicts people finding fortune within river basins and streams.

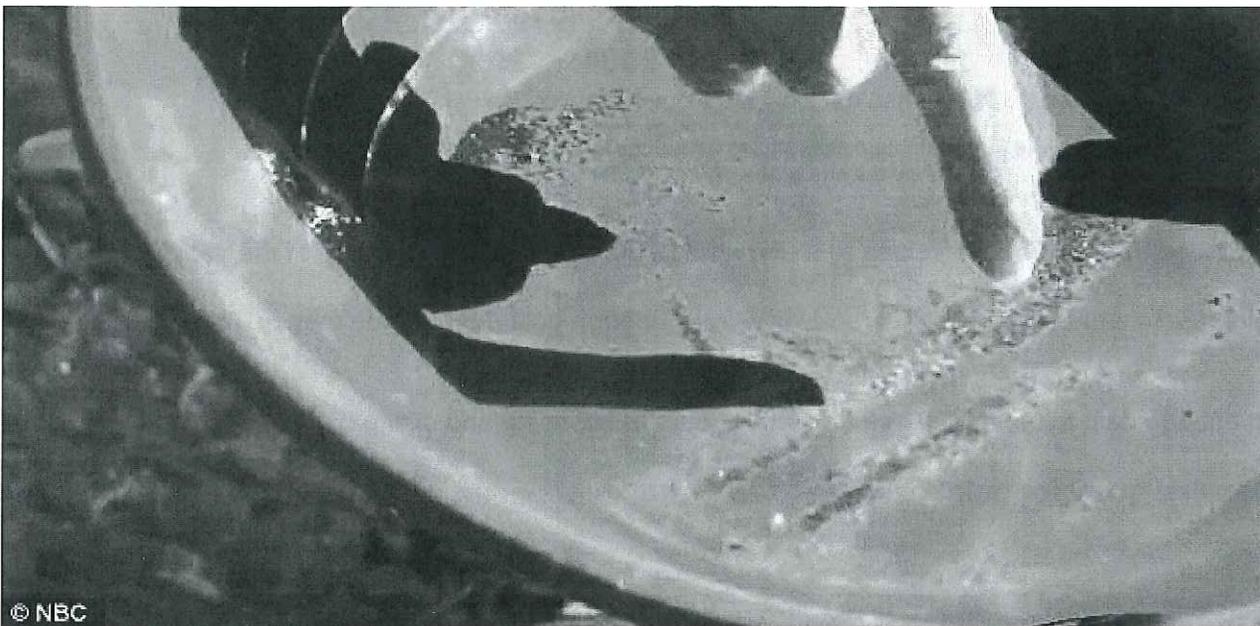
Officials in Larimer County, Colorado, will vote on banning the retrieval of minerals from city land next month, though

'There are other issues that the county commissioners, I feel, should be devoting their efforts to,' Darrell Koleber told **9News**.

He added that there is little to no gold left in the region. Despite the lack of the precious mineral, many recreational prospectors still sift through mud and sediment – not as a means to gain wealth, but as a pastime.



Hobby: Panners say there is little to no gold left in Larimer County, but they keep searching for the thrill of the chase



Chunk of change: Most of the gold prospectors find is barely enough for gas money

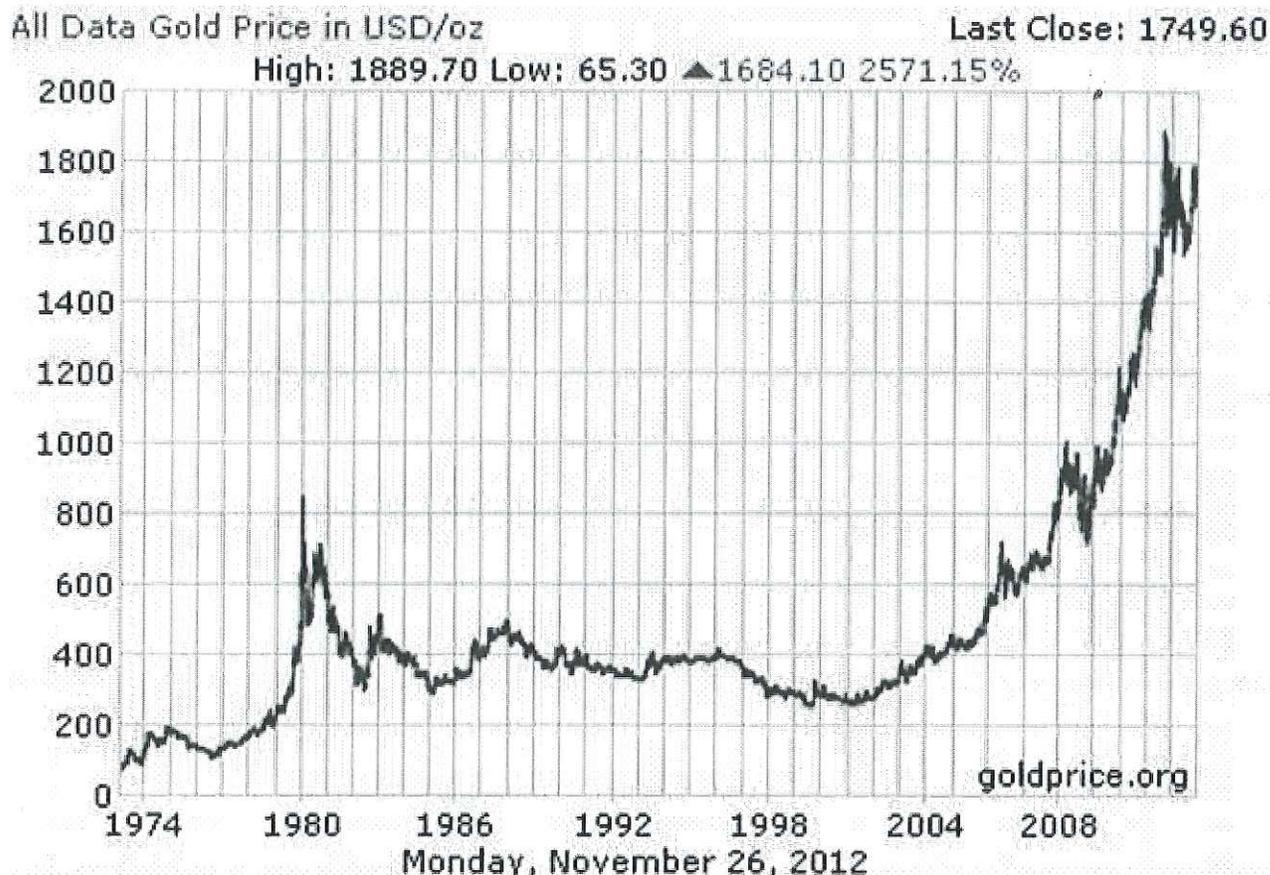
He added: 'I think they're sticking their nose (sic) in one of the few things we can go out and do and have fun and not spend a lot of money.'

Dan Rieves, the visitor services director for the Department of Natural Resources, told the **Denver Post** of his organization's unease.

'The concern is that we have a patchwork of properties that we manage on someone else's behalf. The can of worms for us is the mineral rights,' he told the paper.

The environmental factor, he said, was negligible.

If commissioners do sign off on the rule change, gold hunting in Larimer County would be banned on any land owned by the Department of Natural Resources.



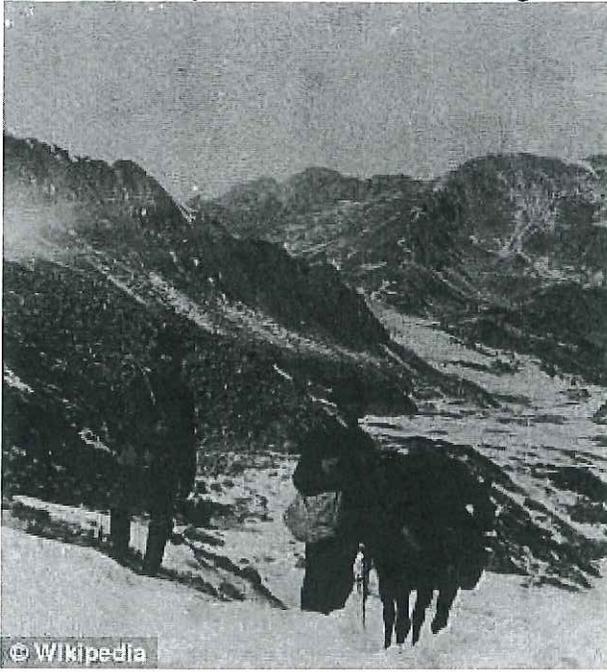
Trend: In 2011, gold prices climbed from \$1,388 per ounce to well over \$1,700, leveling off by the end of the year at \$1,500

Last year, gold prices climbed from \$1,388 per ounce to well over \$1,700, leveling off by the end of the year at \$1,500.

Though the part-time prospectors in Larimer County rarely find even enough gold dust for gas money, many say it's more the thrill of the chase.

Gold panners may find enough dust to make \$20 in a day, after hours of scooping and sifting.

Yellow Fever: Prospectors' quest for gold



Gold fever: Gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858 outside of present-day Denver, sparking the Pike2s

Prospecting for gold can dig up issues of property rights

By Karen Augé *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

Everyone knows the story of gold mining in Colorado — fortune-hunting ruffians working claims with pickaxes, guarding them with pistols and throwing back whiskey in mud-splattered mountain towns that sprang up, thrived and died as fast as a Black Friday line outside a Best Buy. And it was all over with about 120 years ago.

That last part? Well, not so much, it turns out.

Propelled by no fewer than four Discovery Channel shows dedicated to prospecting — and by gold prices around \$1,600 or more an ounce — weekend placers (that's what they call themselves) have been packing up their pans and sluices lately and wading into the state's rivers and streams in numbers not seen in any living person's memory.

Vic's Gold Panning has been outfitting tourist prospectors for decades, but these days it has plenty of competition. Prospecting clubs are sprouting up and down the Front Range, according to Bill Chapman, former owner of Gold-N-Detectors in — where else? — Golden. His club averages about 90 to 100 people at its monthly meetings.

Dan Rieves, visitor-services director for Larimer County's natural-resources department, is all too familiar with the hobby's growing popularity.

The Gold Prospectors Association of America — which, according to its website, has been providing members "with all the tools needed to find gold" since 1968 — lists eight Colorado counties loaded with riches.

Larimer isn't one of them.

Nevertheless, in recent months, Rieves' staff has reported bumping into more and more recreational prospectors — and even what he called "midgrade gold-seekers with gas-powered water pumps."

That is why the county is considering adding, for a while at least, minerals to the list of things people can't harvest from county property. That list already includes American Indian artifacts and some vegetation.

The proposal, which the Larimer County Commissioners are expected to consider next month, has generated a lot of backlash in placer circles.

But it is not a ban, Rieves said. He characterized it as more of a timeout, while county parks-and-wildlife managers and lawyers put their heads together and figure out who has mineral rights to what and where.

"Our concern is not the recreational gold panning — that's no more disruptive to the environment than a guy fishing," Rieves said. "The concern is that we have a patchwork of properties that we manage on someone else's behalf. The can of worms for us is the mineral rights."

Mineral rights can, indeed, be a can of worms, according to Murray Hitzman, a geologist who teaches courses

on mineral deposits at the Colorado School of Mines.

"On federal land or national forest land, the mineral rights would be owned by the federal government," Hitzman said.

But in nonwilderness public areas, it is legal for an individual to stake a claim.

On private property, though, it's not just a matter of figuring out who owns the property, Hitzman said. There's also the issue of who owns mineral rights to that property, and often the two have been separated, he said.

"My guess is most recreational panners are not even bothering with that," he said. "For somebody who goes out on weekends and takes a pan, probably no one is going to worry."

That's because, for the most part, what weekend panners are pulling out of Colorado streams are "tiny gold flakes," Hitzman said. "To get enough to make an ounce, that's a lot of work."

Chapman, who sold his store and insists he is retired even though he answered the phone at Gold-N-Detectors the day before Thanksgiving, said his hobby isn't one for people looking to get rich.

"In an afternoon, I can always come up with \$20 worth of gold, but it is work, and I am old," he said.

On the other hand, getting outfitted for recreational gold panning will set you back about \$50, and there's a good chance you'll recoup that investment, Chapman said.

Just try to tell yourself the same thing as you invest in new skis and a season lift pass.

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Colorado county considers banning panning for gold after 'uptick' in prospecting

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Prospectors during widespread Gold Rushes in the 1800s are credited with settling land and developing commerce in several Western states, including Colorado.

However 200 years later, officials in one Colorado county say amateur prospectors panning for gold on county land have become such a nuisance they are considering banning the practice.

9News reports officials in Larimer county say they will vote on banning widespread prospecting next month after a significant increase in panning.

"There's certainly an uptick," Dan Rieves, visitor services manager for Larimer County, told 9News. "There's rangers that we've had out in the field who have been working here for 10, 15 years that have contacted more people out prospecting in the past 18 months than they have in their entire career."

The vote would lead "minerals" to be added to a list of things that already can't be removed from county land. Officials say the county is not anti-prospecting, and may consider setting up specific prospecting zones or times in the future if the ban is passed.

"We're really just trying to put that regulatory structure in place, and kind of slow things down," Rieves told 9News.

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New manager looks ahead to opening River's Edge Natural Area, connecting trails, creating a volunteer program

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

ReporterHerald.com



As a child, Rob Burdine loved playing outside, watching beavers build dams, constructing forts, exploring and later growing native plants.

That love of the outdoors coupled with a degree in environmental science and 15 years experience protecting and enhancing natural areas is what he brings to Loveland as the city's new natural areas manager.

His first big project will be guiding the construction and habitat enhancements at River's Edge Natural Area, the old Hewlett-Packard ponds that will open to the public sometime next summer or fall. With wetlands, fishing ponds and trails, the property that has been farmland, pit mines and private recreation is expected to draw crowds.

"It's going to be a big statement to the community when we tear down that 8-foot fence along First Street," said Burdine. "I think it will symbolize a new beginning for the natural areas program in Loveland."

Like other area cities and towns and Larimer County, Loveland receives a share of the open space sales tax. Some of that has been used to buy properties, while much of it has been banked for the future. Because of that, Burdine said, the city is in good shape to move the natural areas program into the future.

Two months ago, the city hired Burdine, doubling the full-time staff.

He plans to grow the program with temporary employees and by creating a community volunteer program.

And he looks forward to acquiring new properties, opening to the public some the city already owns and

trying to fill outdoor needs.

"I think there's a big need for us to connect our trails into others in the region," Burdine said.

Other possibilities are converting the Wild property on U.S. 34, already owned by the city, from a small hay field into a natural area with native plants and wildlife habitat by working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. A decision has not been made whether that land would be open to the public or simply preserved and managed.

Loveland is part of a regional study being conducted by Larimer County to catalog outdoor opportunities and identify what needs and wants are missing in the region.

One request that has surfaced is public archery ranges -- something the city may consider, according to Burdine.

"It's popular, but there's not a lot of places to do these things," said Burdine, who brings a fresh outlook to the city and is open to a range of possibilities.

Burdine grew up in the woods of Western Pennsylvania, where he developed a deep love of the outdoors and knowledge of native plants and habitat. He went on to earn an environmental science degree from Bowling Green University in Ohio.

Because of the outdoor opportunities, Burdine moved to Colorado. He worked for 14 years for the Westminster Open Lands Program then six months for Arapahoe County Natural Areas before he was hired by Loveland to fill a newly created position.

Both communities have a sales tax that funds open space similar to the one in place in Larimer County.

Because Loveland has been frugal with its dollars from the tax -- set to expire in 2017 -- the city has money to sustain and operate its program beyond that date.

If voters renew the tax starting in 2018, the city could become more aggressive with buying new properties.

If not, Burdine said he would have to look for grants and other creative ways of acquiring new property.

But first, he is excited to jump right in to the development of River's Edge.

The city has hired a firm to analyze the structural integrity of the historic farm buildings on the property so city staff, the Loveland Historical Society and the Loveland Historic Preservation Commission have facts to develop a plan for the buildings.

Crews already are removing invasive Russian olive and Siberian elm trees from the property, tearing down old structures and readying the land to restore wetlands and vegetation. Construction on the open space will begin in March and the property could be open by late summer, depending on the prime planting time for native wetlands vegetation.

"I can't wait," said Burdine. "To be on board for the first big natural area opening in Loveland, I'm excited."

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