

CSU study finds link between open space, home prices

Reporter-Herald Staff Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

A new study from a Colorado State University research team shows homes in neighborhoods that feature protected open space command prices 20 percent to 29 percent higher than those without open space.

The study, funded by the National Association of Realtors and CSU's School of Global Environmental Sustainability, evaluated home sales in more than 200 developments across Colorado in Larimer, Chaffee, Douglas, Mesa and Routt counties.

"Our study shows that people are willing to pay more to live in subdivisions that incorporate conservation elements," said Sarah Reed, a study co-author, faculty affiliate in the Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Department at CSU and associate conservation scientist with the Wildlife Conservation Society. "This may provide an extra incentive for developers, real estate professionals and lending institutions to market this type of development," she said in a press release.

The study also indicated that a greater number of homes and lots sold per conservation development project vs. conventional development projects between 1998 and 2011.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Sustainable Real Estate.

Reed and Liba Pejchar, assistant professor in the Warner College of Natural Resources, served as principal investigators on the project. They lead a Global Challenges Research team on conservation development, a group of 20 researchers from nine departments in five colleges at CSU, that is looking at data on existing conservation development practices, and developing a scientific basis for evaluating conservation development designs and policies that could be used in future project design in the United States and around the world.

For details on the study, go to <http://cd.colostate.edu>.

Galena fire 95 percent contained

*By Jessica Maher Reporter-Herald Staff Writer Loveland Reporter-Herald
Posted:*

ReporterHerald.com

The Galena fire burning west of Fort Collins in Lory State Park was nearly contained on Tuesday with no additional growth of the 1,348-acre blaze.

According to the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, containment was at 95 percent on Tuesday evening, with the fire holding within its boundary despite the wind and low humidity conditions that caused a Red Flag warning over the area.

Pre-evacuation notices were canceled on Monday night, though the sheriff's office has asked residents in the affected area to remain alert for changing conditions.

About 70 firefighters were released between Monday night and Tuesday night, leaving about 60 firefighters working on securing and mopping up the current hand lines.

Four firefighters have suffered minor injuries -- two over the weekend and two more reported Tuesday morning -- and were treated and released from a local hospital.

The wildfire has been burning in Lory State Park along the west side of Horsetooth Reservoir since Friday. Lory State Park remains closed while the Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, including the Horsetooth Mountain and Soderberg trails are set to reopen to the public at 9 a.m. Wednesday.

Jessica Maher can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 516, or maherj@reporter-herald.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@JessicaMaherRH](https://twitter.com/JessicaMaherRH).

Our Lands, Our future: Countywide survey looks at open spaces, trails

Written by Stephen Meyers
Mar. 19

coloradoan.com

Our Lands, Our future: Countywide survey looks at open spaces, trails

Residents give feedback on local trails, natural areas and open spaces in countywide survey.

Our Lands — Our Future Survey

The survey from Our Lands-Our Future is a comprehensive study of regional land conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation. The countywide study joined all of the municipalities in Larimer County, including the cities of Fort Collins, Loveland and Windsor. The full report is posted at www.larimer.org/ourlands_ourfuture.

Visit <http://tplgis.org/OurLands-OurFuture/> to view an online mapping tool to show where property owners have conserved open space, and to gauge your values for voluntary conservation opportunities for the future.

Know your Larimer County Open Lands and Natural Areas

The open spaces in Fort Collins and Loveland, like Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Horsetooth Reservoir and Devil's Backbone Open Space, are maintained and operated by Larimer County.

Natural areas, such as Pineridge, Bobcat Ridge and Cathy Fromme Prairie are maintained and operated by the city of Fort Collins

Larimer County Open Spaces: Big Thompson Parks, Carter Lake, Devil's Backbone Open Space, Eagle's Nest Open Space, Estes Park campgrounds at East Portal and Mary's Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Hermit Park Open Space, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Horsetooth Reservoir, Lions' Open Space, Pinewood Reservoir, Ramsay-Shockey Open Space, Red Mountain Open Space, River Bluffs Open Space.

City of Fort Collins Natural Areas: Arapaho Bend, Bobcat Ridge, Butterfly Woods, Cathy Fromme Prairie, Cattail Chorus, Colina Mariposa, Cottonwood Hollow, Coyote Ridge, Eagle View, Fischer, Fossil Creek Reservoir, Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space, Fossil Creek Wetlands, Gateway, Gustav Swanson, Hazaleus, Kingfisher Point, Magpie Meander, Mallard's Net, Maxwell, McMurry, Nix Farm, North Shields Ponds, Pelican Marsh, Pineridge, Prairie Dog Meadow, Prospect Ponds, Red Fox Meadows, Redtail Grove, Redwing Marsh, Reservoir Ridge, River's Edge, Riverbend Ponds, Ross, Running Deer, Salyer, Soapstone Prairie, Springer, The Coterie, Two Creeks, Udall, Williams.

 Two climbers from Fort Collins, John Suhy and Thaddeus Blair, spent a blissful, sunny Wednesday afternoon climbing at Rotary Park.

With indie music bumping from his iPod resting on a small rock near his equipment, Suhy stuck his hands in his black bag of white chalk, hopped on the vertical boulder called The Right Eliminator and gracefully scaled the classic bouldering problem at Horsetooth Reservoir.

"You asked what my job was? This is my job, climbing. This is basically what I live for," Suhy said. "We're out here as often as we can. We're so lucky to have a premier climbing spot like this right in our backyard."

Suhy and Blair were just two of nearly a dozen climbers — both top roping and bouldering — taking

advantage of the balmy March weather this past week.

Runners training for April's Horsetooth Half Marathon huffed and puffed up Centennial Drive. Mountain bikers climbed the rocky trails along the reservoir, and anglers dipped their fishing poles on the eastern shores of the reservoir.

Thousands of people use the open spaces west of Fort Collins every year, according to a survey recently released by Larimer County. And they go often. On average, those people visit the sites nearly 24 times a year.

The Our Lands — Our Future project, administered by Boulder's RRC Associates, investigated use and satisfaction with trails, natural areas and nature-based facilities, community values for open spaces and views on natural areas and trail management. The survey provided an opportunity for feedback and suggestions and also compared the results from a similar survey taken in 2001.

About 53 percent of the 922 respondents were Fort Collins residents, and the survey results will help open space managers with future planning and policy to rewrite the Larimer County Parks 2001 Master Plan.

"Really, there weren't a whole lot of surprises in the results," said Larimer County Department of Natural Resources spokesman Zac Wiebe. "People in the area love using our various trails and visiting open lands."

Among the findings from the survey:

- The majority of respondents support the use of public funds toward conservation/acquisition.
- Respondents are most in favor of implementing user fees as a way to obtain funding for conservation/acquisition.
- People want to see more trails as well as more land or facilities for camping and fishing
- Residents prefer an "equal balance" in prioritization toward preservation and recreation, rather than favoring one over the other.
- More than half of respondents indicated they were "not at all" or "somewhat" familiar with countywide natural areas, though more responders are familiar with the county's open spaces and natural areas than in 2001.

"Although I wonder how people cannot be aware of all these wonderful places while living in Colorado, that is something that falls on us," Wiebe said. "We'll be evaluating how we do outreach, whether that's more digital, social media and email-type things."

Changes wanted

Anglers Lee Gunkle and Megan Scapellati fished together from the eastern shoreline at Horsetooth Reservoir on Wednesday afternoon. Both originally from Allentown, Pa., the couple now lives in Fort Collins and often visits the county's open spaces and natural areas.

"We're out once a week, twice a week; I wasn't wasting a nice day like today," said Gunkle, who caught 18

largemouth bass on Wednesday. “We do a lot of fishing, sometimes hiking, and we’re out on our kayak during the summer.”

Scapellati said she wouldn’t change anything about the county’s open spaces, though Gunkle said more garbage cans would be beneficial.

“I see a lot of (stuff) floating around all the time out there (on Horsetooth Reservoir),” Gunkle said.

Users pay a \$6 to \$7 fee for entrance and daily use of several Larimer County open spaces, with the revenue from fees going toward open spaces’ operating and personnel expenses, such as restroom supplies and trash collection, as Gunkle suggested.

Seven percent of users surveyed cited the fees as their reason for not visiting the county’s open spaces and natural areas.

“I think user fees are always going to be a part of the equation in maintaining high-quality open space lands for public use. But I also think the fees are very affordable,” said Rob Noble, director of communications for Ciclismo Racing. “I gladly pay for both a Lory State Park pass (which is under the management of Colorado Parks and Wildlife) and a Larimer County Open Space pass each year on the grounds that they are both cheaper than my monthly cable bill, and I get a whole lot more enjoyment from those passes, too.”

Among the most-coveted land/facilities survey responders wanted include more paved hiking/walking/biking trails, camping and fishing opportunities and more dog-friendly areas.

“We received a lot of comments about more off-leash opportunities for people with dogs,” Wiebe said.

Noble said Fort Collins would benefit from a true “bike park” like Valmont Bike Park in Boulder. He said there is currently a grassroots effort being headed by Dot Dickerson and Tim Anderson to bring a bike park to Fort Collins.

“Cycling events are difficult to host for a variety of permitting issues, traffic issues, overuse issues, etc.,” Noble said. “Having a place where we could safely and easily host a variety of cycling events would be tremendous for our community.”

Wiebe also said survey responders were passionate about seeing more shooting — both guns and archery — and hunting opportunities in Larimer County.

Many people shoot guns on the Pawnee National Grassland and Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, though both areas have no designated shooting areas. Several areas along roads in the grassland are marked “prohibited” with signs. In January, Larimer County commissioners unanimously approved joining a consortium to study shooting on public lands.

Comparing to 2001

In 2001, Larimer County Open Lands commissioned a survey similar to the Our Lands — Our Future project.

Both surveys asked respondents to indicate their familiarity with Larimer County’s open lands. In 2001, only

13 percent of respondents indicated they were familiar or very familiar with the natural areas of Larimer County. The 2012 survey had 46 percent of respondents say they were familiar or very familiar with the county's open lands.

Respondents also were asked to partake in a funding allocation exercise in both surveys. Protecting wildlife habitat and water sources were allotted large increments of money both in 2001 and 2012.

Respondents were asked if given \$100 in public-fund dollars, how would they allocate it. Wildlife habitat averaged \$20 in 2001, making it the top priority. It fell to around \$11 in 2012 but still ranked as the second-most important priority. Water sources were allotted \$16 in 2001, making it the third-most important priority and almost \$15 in 2012, making it the top priority.

In 2001, the survey asked "How important to you is the development of a regional trail system in Larimer County?" Seventy percent of respondents indicated it was important or very important. These values have been similarly reflected in the 2012 survey. In the funding allocation exercise, creating greenways or trail corridors that connect communities and parks ranked fourth (an average of 49 percent allotted to this category).

"Comparing the survey results has been interesting and we're identifying those priority conservation areas and how we can pay for them," Wiebe said. "There seems to be more and more pressure to maintaining these open spaces. More people are using the areas. Because of the economy, people tend to vacation closer to home. People want us to continue to protect land protect recreation opportunities."

Survey: Larimer County residents want government to invest in more open space

Written by Bobby Magill

Mar. 19

coloradoan.com

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Ninety-seven percent of the respondents agreed that public funds should be used for land conservation and acquisition, with most favoring spending more money on buying more land than investing in existing land.

Acquiring and conserving ecologically sensitive land was important to 70 percent of those responding, while 73 percent said more land should be purchased or conserved for regional trail corridors.

Forty-seven percent said local governments should acquire working farms and ranches.

When asked what local governments' single-most important priority for land acquisition or conservation should be, buying and conserving ecologically sensitive lands were ranked as the top priority, followed by lands near neighborhoods and schools.

The survey was conducted late last year on behalf of all the city and town governments in Larimer County and the county itself by a Boulder consulting firm. About 53 percent of the 922 respondents were Fort Collins residents.

The results of the survey will be used to guide local government open space planning and Larimer County's rewrite of its open space master plan.

Larimer County voters approved an open space sales tax in 1995 and renewed it in 1999. It sunsets in 2018, when voters will have to weigh in on another open space sales tax extension.

Half of the people who responded to the survey moved to the county since the last sales tax vote, said Larimer County Department of Natural Resources spokesman Zac Wiebe.

Annual Fishing Expo and a look at how wildfires and drought affect fishing are on tap this week

Reporter-Herald Staff Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

Enjoy the annual Fishing Expo today and learn about the effects of wildfire and drought on aquatic wildlife including fish at a program Tuesday. Other events offered in the area this week include an Elvis impersonator and a St. Patrick's Day parade.

Sunday

Fishing Expo offers casting demos, seminars and more

The second day of the annual Fishing Expo will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the First National Bank Building at The Ranch, 5280 Arena Circle, Loveland.

Admission is free to daily seminars, events for kids, and much more.

Daily events include a Fishful Thinker Casting Contest, Kids Casting Contest, fly-casting demonstrations and more.

On Saturday, seminars will be held hourly from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

For details, go to larimer.org/naturalresources or call Mark Caughlan at 498-5600.

Monday

Learn about how criminal cases are handled

The League of Women Voters of Larimer County will present a free program, "Law and Order: the Life of a Criminal Case," at 7 p.m. at the Coloradoan Meeting Room, 1300 Riverside Ave., Fort Collins.

Two judges from the Larimer County Court will talk about all that happens in a criminal trial -- from the role of the judge, the jury, the prosecution and the defense in a criminal case; how criminal cases are brought and how they proceed; setting of the bail; the plea bargaining process; to how judges determine the appropriate sentences after conviction.

For details, visit LWV-larimercounty.org or join the conversation at [Facebook.com/LWVlarimercounty](https://www.facebook.com/LWVlarimercounty).

Tuesday

Specialist to explain how wildfire and drought impact fishing

An aquatic specialist from Colorado Parks and Wildlife will discuss the effects and ramifications of the wildfires and drought conditions on the fish and other aquatic wildlife at 7 p.m. at the Bison Visitor Center, 1800 South County Road 31, Loveland.

The event is hosted by Friends of Larimer County Parks and Open Lands and the public is welcome.

For details, call 493-4791.

Wednesday

Impersonator to offer 'Music of the King'

Elvis tribute artist Steve Creason will return to the Candlelight Dinner Playhouse, 4747 Marketplace Drive, Johnstown, for "Music of the King: A Tribute Concert." Dinner starts at 6 p.m., with the show at 7:30 p.m.

Creason performs many of Elvis's greatest hits including selections from his Grammy Award-winning gospel albums, accompanied by the Kings Messengers, his backup singers and musicians.

Tickets are \$42.50 and include a gourmet dinner.

For tickets, call 744-3747 or visit coloradocandlelight.com.

Thursday

Learn to make kimchi

The Larimer County Extension will begin its spring series of food preservation and preparation workshops with a workshop on Fermented Vegetables at 6-8 p.m. at the Extension Office, 1525 Blue Spruce Drive, Fort Collins.

Natural fermentation is one of the oldest means of food preservation. Learn the science of preparing and storing sauerkraut, kimchi and other fermented vegetables safely.

The workshop fee is \$25.

Preregistration is required. Register online at larimer.org/ext or call Edie McSherry at 498-6008.

Friday-Saturday

Home Education Show set at The Ranch

Home Instruction Ministries and Probasco's Christian Bookstore will present the annual Spring Home Education Show Friday and Saturday, at the First National Bank Exhibition Hall -- The Ranch, 5280 Arena Circle, Loveland.

Hours are noon-5 p.m. Friday and 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday.

A used book sale will take place at 8 a.m.-noon Saturday.

Admission to the show is \$5.50 per person. Children under 18 are free. The admission fee covers both days.

For details, call 667-8819 or visit homeinstructionministries.com/index.html.

Saturday

North Forty News



POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD SELECTS NEW SUPERINTENDENT
WELLINGTON H&R BLOCK OFFERING SECOND LOOK AT TAX RETURNS

Hermit Park Open Space open for the season

BY LIBBY JAMES ON MARCH 12, 2013 IN DISPATCHES · ADD COMMENT

Hermit Park Open Space is open for the 2013 recreation season. Some cabins and campsites are available on a walk-in basis depending on weather. Reservations for April through October can be made at www.larimercamping.com or 1-800-397-7795. Reservations for the new equestrian campground can be made at 1-800-397-7795. For more information about Hermit Park Open Space larimer.org/naturalresources/hermitpark.cfm



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FEB 1 Fri	10:00 am Susan A. Barnett's Not in Your Face series Exhibition @ The Center for Fine Art Photography
MAR 1 Fri	10:00 am Meeri Koutaniemi's, Namibia, Re/colonized, De/customized series exhibition @ The Center for Fine Art Photography
MAR 14 Thu	9:00 am Now Registering Host Families @ Face the World Foundation
	5:45 pm Vinyasa Flow Yoga classes @ Bellvue Grange
	6:00 pm CLVFD Training @ Crystal Lakes @40.847631,-105.635613
	6:30 pm Wellington Zumba @ 3Seven12

Survey: Larimer County residents want government to invest in more open space

Written by Bobby Magill

Mar. 04

coloradoan.com

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Ninety-seven percent of the respondents agreed that public funds should be used for land conservation and acquisition, with most favoring spending more money on buying more land than investing in existing land.

Acquiring and conserving ecologically sensitive land was important to 70 percent of those responding, while 73 percent said more land should be purchased or conserved for regional trail corridors.

Forty-seven percent said local governments should acquire working farms and ranches.

When asked what local governments' single-most important priority for land acquisition or conservation should be, buying and conserving ecologically sensitive lands were ranked as the top priority, followed by lands near neighborhoods and schools.

The survey was conducted late last year on behalf of all the city and town governments in Larimer County and the county itself by a Boulder consulting firm. About 53 percent of the 922 respondents were Fort Collins residents.

The results of the survey will be used to guide local government open space planning and Larimer County's rewrite of its open space master plan.

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Larimer County releases Our Lands-Our Future citizen survey results

Written by | By Beacon news services

Mar. 03

coloradoan.com

Study continues

The Our Lands-Our Future study is ongoing with further public outreach tools being implemented. Another opportunity for input will be at a public meeting from 6-8 p.m., Wednesday at The Fountains of Loveland and Devil's Backbone Grill (La Quinta Inn) in west Loveland at Cascade Avenue and U.S. Highway 34. Participants will have a chance to use a new interactive mapping website, participate in a second survey, and give comments and feedback on their land conservation priorities. Activities for the kids will keep the entire family engaged. The event is free, no registration required.

Larimer County and all the municipalities within it recently released the results of a survey about land conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

The citizen survey, administered by RRC Associates, investigated use and satisfaction with trails, natural areas and nature-based facilities, community values for open space, views on natural areas and trail management, and provided an opportunity for suggestions and feedback.

The survey results will help open space managers with future planning and policy. The survey is one element of Our Lands-Our Future, a comprehensive study of regional land conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

The full report is posted at www.larimer.org/our_lands_ourfuture.

Scientific survey results

All respondents had visited at least one natural area in Larimer County in the past year. When asked, "If you do not use natural areas or nature-based facilities in Larimer County, what are the reasons?" lack of awareness of natural areas or facilities and lack of time were the top responses.

The top recreation choices were walking/hiking/running on paved and natural surface trails, biking on paved trails or roads, camping, recreating with dogs and fishing. Satisfaction with recreation experiences was high and only hunting and snowmobiling opportunities received less than 60 percent high satisfaction ratings. Respondents were most interested in agencies acquiring additional lands/facilities for walking/hiking/running on natural surfaces and biking on paved trails, and supported the use of public funds to make those acquisitions.

When asked about future priorities for land conservation spending, waterways such as lakes, rivers and streams, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities and trail corridors were respondents' top choices. Regarding funding sources, participants in the survey preferred implementing user fees and extending sales taxes to fund future conservation and management of natural lands and facilities. Respondents also indicated an interest in funding being divided between the acquisition of new natural areas (67 percent) and the management of existing (31 percent) areas similar to the split outlined in the current citizen initiated quarter-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales Tax, which supports conservation and recreation efforts throughout Larimer County.

Another part of the survey queried citizens about their opinion on types of land that should be acquired.

Regional trail corridors, ecologically sensitive lands and lands near neighborhoods and schools were identified as the top priorities. Most citizens preferred an equal management emphasis on conservation versus recreation.

Nearly half of those surveyed were familiar or very familiar with Larimer County's natural areas and open spaces. Most learned about trails and programs at the natural area or program location, through local newspapers or via websites. Respondents identified email and newspapers as the best way to reach themselves.

Demographics of survey respondents generally matched the demographics of Larimer County.

The survey concluded with several open-ended questions, which generated over 100 pages of input which is seen as a strong indication of the depth of attention and interest in open space and natural areas in Larimer County.

The survey was mailed to a random sample of 7,500 Larimer County residents, and 922 people responded resulting in a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percentage points.

In addition to the mailed survey, an online version was available to the general public. The online option generated another 1,248 responses and, while not included in the statistically valid reporting, will contribute to the feedback received so far.

A similar survey was conducted in 2001. The 2012 survey found that awareness of natural areas in Larimer County had grown significantly (from 13 percent to 46 percent choosing familiar or very familiar with local open spaces). Similar conservation preferences were identified in both years, with wildlife habitat and waterways topping the priority list. Regional trail systems were also supported strongly by 70 percent of respondents in both surveys.

Partners in Our Lands-Our Future include Larimer County, the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, and the towns of Berthoud, Estes Park, Johnstown, Timnath, Wellington and Windsor.

Public session planned next week to talk about funding possibilities

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

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

Larimer County residents say they love hiking, biking, camping and fishing opportunities and want local governments to spend more money on acquiring new open spaces than on managing the current recreational opportunities.

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources released the results this week of a survey about conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

Now, the department is looking for even more input from residents and is holding a public meeting in Loveland to hear what open lands opportunities residents want and how they want to pay for them.

While the county took the lead on Our Lands-Our Future, all cities and towns within Larimer County partnered on the project for a regional look at what residents think the future should hold for natural areas.

If You Go

What: Our Lands-Our Future public meeting where residents can offer feedback on open lands and conservation priorities and try out a new interactive mapping website.

When: 5:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Where: Backbone Gourmet Grub & Brewhouse, 1480 Cascade Ave., Loveland (next to the LaQuinta Inn off West U.S. 34).

Cost: Free, no reservations needed.

Info: larimer.org/ourlands_ourfuture/

A consultant mailed the survey to a random sample of 7,500 residents; 922 responded.

Of those, all had visited at least one natural area within the last year. The majority said they routinely visit such areas and prefer trails, cycling paths, camping, fishing and recreating with dogs. Their satisfaction with the experience was high.

Also, they said they want more natural areas with the money to pay for them coming from user fees and possible extension of a quarter cent sales tax for open lands. The current tax expires in 2018, and officials would have to persuade voters to extend it.

If they do, survey respondents would want the money split, 67 percent toward new areas and 31 percent toward management of existing areas.

For those who do not regularly visit natural areas, they said they do not have the time and are not aware of what areas and types of recreation are available. The lack of awareness surprised Zac Wiebe, Natural Resources specialist who spearheaded the survey. He said his department will explore ways to reach other people with information on natural areas, open lands and programs that are offered at these locations.

The official survey results were based on the 922 responses, but 1,248 additional residents filled out the survey online, where it was open to anyone who wanted to participate. This feedback will be evaluated as Larimer County updates its open lands master plan to map out the future of outdoor recreation in the county.

Now, Larimer County is seeking even more detail on what residents think of recreational opportunities and funding. A public meeting is scheduled 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday at Backbone Gourmet Grub & Brewhouse at the LaQuinta Inn on West Eisenhower Boulevard.

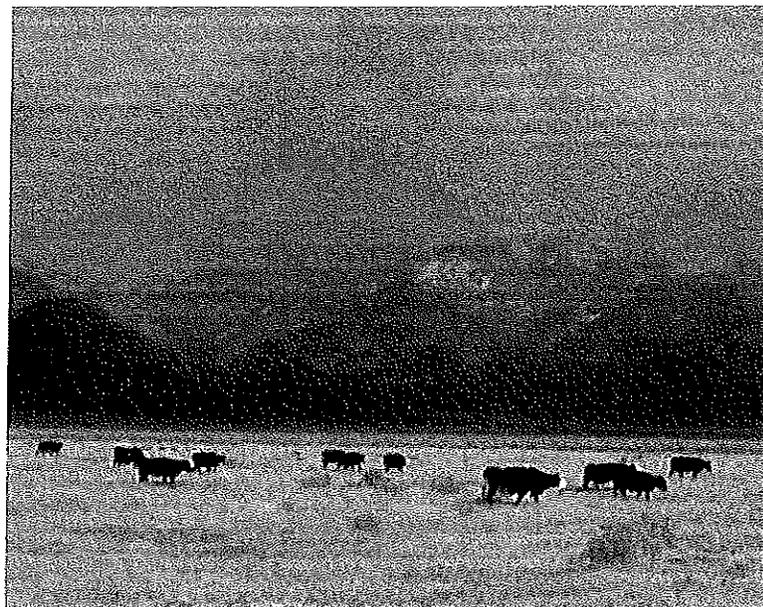
Pamela Dickman can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 526, or pdickman@reporter-herald.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@pamelalittlebee](https://twitter.com/pamelalittlebee).

Ranching

In this column, NewsAccount talks with CPAs from various industries that are important in the U.S. and Colorado economies. We ask: What's happening today? What factors will affect your industry over the next 12 months? In this issue, we focus on ranching.

BY NATALIE ROONEY

PHOTO BY MATHEW KURT BARNES



Timothy D. Bachicha, CPA
SLV Farm & Ranch Business Services
Monte Vista, Colo.

About the Organization

SLV Farm & Ranch Business Services is the successor to the San Luis Valley Farm & Ranch Management Association. SLVFRMA was part of a statewide cooperative program funded by its members, under the auspices of the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. Association personnel provided financial record-keeping and tax management assistance to members. It also gathered real, not survey, data from member farms and ranches for use by the University's Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics (DARE). In 2003, the University ended its involvement, and SLV Farm & Ranch Business Services took over as a private organization to fulfill the needs of the agriculture community.

What role does ranching play in Colorado's economy?

According to USDA statistics, Colorado is among the top 10 states which account for 58% of all cattle and calves in the U.S. Agriculture overall is Colorado's second largest industry. Farms and ranches report over \$7 billion in cash receipts and represent approximately \$20 billion of economic activity. Nearly 60%, or \$4.1 billion, comes from ranching, which includes all meat and other livestock production. Beef cattle and calves alone account for \$3 billion of the cash receipts. Other livestock-related income — hogs, sheep, dairy, and poultry — makes up the rest. Beef and livestock-related products are Colorado's top export.

What challenges face Colorado's ranching industry?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture shows that Colorado lost more than 2.4 million acres of farmland between 1987 and 2007. The reduction of acreage means there is less private land to be used for forage and grazing. This means more producers will have to rely more on public land leases for grazing. Because of restrictions for environmental reasons, public lands normally used may be less available in the future. Land for grazing is critical, but also land to produce forage and other feeds can sometimes be converted to other crop production.

It would be hard to overstate the negative impact of the estate tax on all family farms, but ranches are being hit especially hard. The IRS values land at its highest and best use for estate valuation purposes. Typical farmland used in crop production may, but not always, be valued for estate purposes at close to its real fair market value because the highest and best use of that land is production of crops. And unless a corn field is close to a growing suburb, that remains true. However, many ranches are located in areas where the highest and best use might be development or splitting into 35-acre ranchettes. That will drive the estate value to three, four, or five times its value for ranching. This is especially true in the mountain areas west of I-25, particularly for land close to rivers and recreation areas. Most ranches have developed their value over at least two generations, and that value is in their land and animal inventory, not cash. This forces a family to either re-mortgage the land, or sell some of it to

pay the tax bill. At the macro level, reduction in acres has a certain impact. But at the micro level — at the family level — to reduce acreage of a ranch can have a devastating impact. It might mean the operation will no longer work.

Organizations like the Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) are assisting ranchers ease the burden of estate taxes and loss of ranch land. Though not appropriate for everyone, by granting a conservation easement to a qualified organization, ranchers can be assured that the land will be kept in agricultural production. In addition, conservation easements also have benefits related to charitable contributions and state tax credits.

Because of the increasing costs of land, the barrier to entry is high and actually can be impossible to overcome for someone trying to break into the business. The net returns from small family operations may not cashflow the debt service for large mortgages, and bankers are hesitant to lend money on new operations. This means that unless a young person is already part of a family operation, the likelihood that individual will be a rancher is slim.

In addition, because land values are increasing, some operations are taking advantage of the higher prices they can get and selling out to developers or others who will not keep the land in production. This increases the pressure because less land is in use and also because the new owners may not be as amenable to having operations close by with the attendant smells and other realities of raising livestock.

Farm program payments from both the USDA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service can be very helpful in operating a ranch. Those programs have very specific



guidelines, as well as specific public benefits to be gained, especially in resource conservation, water projects, etc. Specific subsidies for particular commodities help to ensure that the prices of our food products are not subject to wild swings.

There can be some negative side effects, such as causing temporary artificial demands in the market, and these can be exacerbated when other conditions are present. For example, some believe that the government subsidy of milk has indirectly caused an increase in the price of hay. But without that subsidy, the price of milk would be in excess of \$6 per gallon. The rancher feels that impact in the increased cost of production. Offsetting this somewhat is the fact that ranchers are temporarily receiving higher prices for their slaughter calves, and that's because overall numbers are down.

The increased cost of feed, as well as the restrictions on grazing lands, is making it harder to achieve a positive bottom line. The direct impact of the current drought means that ranchers who rent land from the government may not get the full use of the land because the grasses are not as abundant. This results in shorter grazing times, causing increased pressure on the demand for other feed that is raised in farming operations. That increased demand also affects the price of feed and the cost of production. In addition, the drought has resulted in less available water for the cattle to drink in their grazing allotments. The cost of hauling water for the cattle also causes the rancher to bring the cattle off the range sooner than is optimal.

For ranchers who raise their own feed, the availability of water for crops is very important.

But increased pressure on aquifers by those who drill wells and pump water also affects the availability of surface water. Many times, senior water right holdets do not get the full benefit of that water right because someone close by is pumping out of the aquifer which pulls the surface water toward those wells. In our area, as well in those over the other major aquifers in the mid- to east part of Colorado, water users are becoming more and more subject to special regulations and special water districts. The full impact of these regulations is yet to be seen, but many producers are already subject to higher costs for water.

Generally, capital is fairly available, and interest rates are very low. This might seem to be an opportunity to use leverage for expansion. But as both lenders and producers know, strong net equity is the key to viability of a family farm or ranch. While prices for their products are at really good levels now, comparatively speaking, this should be a reason to actually build a stronger net equity rather than reaching out and expanding. Those who are carefully managing their cash flow to improve their own liquidity will be in a better position to capitalize on opportunities that may arise to acquire additional lands for their own operations. Along with rising prices for their own products/animals, we have seen substantial growth in the costs to operate. Because of the drought, there have been reductions in herd sizes. It will take years to rebuild, and those with strong balance sheets will be better positioned to use the opportunities. In addition, ranchers would do well to develop short- and long-term plans for continuation and transfer of their operations. Whether to sell out, or to

pass it on to the next generation already working in the operation, these decisions are much easier to make when the operation is not highly leveraged, either for operating loans or mortgages.

What is your role within your organization?

I am an advisor to my clients. I strive to provide good information that they can use to make good decisions related to their business in the areas of management of operations, as well as tax management and transition planning. Because of my background with Cooperative Extension here in Colorado, I have access to many resources across the country in other land grant universities and Extension programs.

Is this a good time to be in the ranching industry?

For the majority of my ranch clients, small to medium-sized ranch operations, the answer depends on one quantitative factor and one subjective factor. The quantitative factor relates to how highly leveraged one is, is the cash flow sufficient to meet the obligations and still have a little left over to live on, and possibly put a little away into savings or retirement account? The subjective factor is related to the realization that most ranchers didn't get into this to make a lot of money. Like most other agricultural producers, they actually live in the business, and it is a lifestyle as much as it is a way to make a living. For many ranch families, the spouse usually has another job in town to help meet the family's needs, and help sustain this way of life.▲

RH Line: Calls printed March 5

Posted:

ReporterHerald.com

Service Dogs

"I'm calling about the comment in the Saturday paper pertaining to the dog going into stores and the person saying that if a dog was a certain size, it wasn't a service dog. I disagree, because service dogs, the ones that detect people having seizures and everything, those can be of any size. ... They are service dogs to people. So I agree people shouldn't be bringing their pets in, but I don't think we should be judging people for what they say they need these dogs for."

"In answer to the call on service dogs. ... You are not supposed to ask what kind of service dog it is. I know a lot of people that have PTSD, and they have dogs for just that purpose. It doesn't matter if they're large dogs or small dogs, and they don't have to answer you as to what kind of a dog it is. It could be very embarrassing for them."

Gun Laws

"Let's see if our state legislators and lawmakers are all gonna do the local version of sending jobs overseas by sending Magpul out of the state."

Natural Grocer

"I'm calling about the stores in Loveland. I think that Whole Foods and the other one there are very expensive. I think that Spouts is more the family-type grocery store that you can afford to go in and buy good groceries and produce and stuff there. And it just seems more logical for Loveland, and we hope that they do come in here."

Open Space

"In regard to the open space comments in the RH Line, I think that we need open space and more of it around here. Otherwise, we're going to end up with an unrelenting sea of houses and the congestion that goes along with it, like we were heading for before they purchased the current open space."

"I'm not inclined to pay taxes for open space. I mean, the whole eastern half of Colorado is open space, to say nothing of

Wyoming. No, I'm not inclined to pay taxes for open space any more than I'm inclined to pay taxes for sunshine and fresh air."

RH Line

SHERIFF'S VIEWS

"I hate to break it to Sunday's caller, 'Good for Justin Smith and boo on the politicians,' but Justin Smith is a politician. He's running for office every time he parrots the NRA policy. Many unelected police chiefs, on the other hand, understand the threat to their officers from even more sophisticated weapons. I have to wonder about the principles of many law enforcement officers who say they'll refuse to obey federal gun laws."

MORE OPEN SPACE

"I reject the notion that county residents want to pay taxes for more open space. To me, that is ridiculous. Why in the world

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To comment on any story in today's paper, or on issues important to you, call us at

635-3637

would somebody want a tax to create more open space? How many thousands of acres are west of Loveland that are available through federal forestlands and Rocky Mountain National Park? My goodness. Are people so lazy they can't travel 10 miles?"

"The people who would like to have some more open space should think about it carefully. Pretty soon there will not be any

open space. Every place you look there will be a campground or there will be a place to build a fire or there will be a bunch of messes that other people leave. Just leave well enough alone and leave our open spaces true open spaces."

SERVICE DOGS

"In response to 'Dogs in Stores,' please don't be so fast to judge. Smaller-size dogs can be trained to assist the hearing impaired or to alert people who may have a seizure. If the dog in a store is not causing a problem and is well-behaved, it shouldn't be of concern. But if you are concerned ask the owner what kind of a service dog it is. I'm sure that person would be glad to share with you."

Residents want more open space

Public session planned next week to talk about funding possibilities

By PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Larimer County residents say they love hiking, biking, camping and fishing opportunities and want local governments to spend more money on acquiring new open spaces than on managing

the current recreational opportunities.

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources released the results this week of a survey about conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

Now, the department is looking for even more input from residents and is holding a public meeting in Loveland to hear what open lands opportunities residents want and how they want to pay for them.

While the county took the lead on Our Lands-Our Future, all cities and towns within Larimer County partnered on the project for a regional look at what residents think the future should hold for natural areas.

A consultant mailed the survey to a random sample of 7,500 residents; 922 responded.

Of those, all had visited at least one natural area within the last year. The majority said they routinely visit such areas and prefer

trails, cycling paths, camping, fishing and recreating with dogs. Their satisfaction with the experience was high.

Also, they said they want more natural areas with the money to pay for them coming from user fees and possible extension of a quarter cent sales tax for open lands. The current tax expires in 2018, and officials would have to persuade voters to extend it.

If they do, survey respondents

SEE OPEN SPACE, PAGE A2

OPEN SPACE: Public meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday

FROM PAGE A1

would want the money split, 67 percent toward new areas and 31 percent toward management of existing areas.

For those who do not regularly visit natural areas, they said they do not have the time and are not aware of what areas and types of recreation are available. The lack of awareness surprised Zac Wiebe, Natural Resources specialist who spearheaded the survey. He said his department will explore ways to reach other people with information on natural areas, open lands and programs that are offered at these locations.

The official survey results

If You Go

What: Our Lands-Our Future public meeting where residents can offer feedback on open lands and conservation priorities and try out a new interactive mapping website.

When: 5:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Where: Backbone Gourmet Grub & Brewhouse, 1480 Cascade Ave., Loveland (next to the LaQuinta Inn off West U.S. 34).

Cost: Free, no reservations needed.

Info: larimer.org/ourlands_ourfuture

anyone who wanted to participate. This feedback will be evaluated as Larimer County updates its open lands master plan to map out the future of outdoor recreation in the county.

Now, Larimer County is seeking even more detail on what residents think of recreational opportunities and funding. A public meeting is scheduled 5:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesday at Backbone Gourmet Grub & Brewhouse at the LaQuinta Inn on West Eisenhower Boulevard.

were based on the 922 responses, but 1,248 additional residents filled out the survey online, where it was open to

Pamela Dickman can be reached at 669-5050, ext. 526, or pdickman@reporter-herald.com. Follower her on Twitter: @pamelalittlebee.

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Larimer County releases Our Lands-Our Future citizen survey results

Feb. 28, 2013 11:26 PM, | Comments

A A

Written by
| By Beacon news services

Larimer County and all the municipalities within it recently released the results of a survey about land conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

FILED UNDER

Windsor Beacon
Windsor News
U.S. Highway 34

The citizen survey, administered by RRC Associates, investigated use and satisfaction with trails, natural areas and nature-based facilities, community values for open space, views on natural areas and trail management, and provided an opportunity for suggestions and feedback.

The survey results will help open space managers with future planning and policy. The survey is one element of Our Lands-Our Future, a comprehensive study of regional land conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation.

Study continues

The Our Lands-Our Future study is ongoing with further public outreach tools being implemented. Another opportunity for input will be at a public meeting from 6-8 p.m., Wednesday at The Fountains of Loveland and Devil's Backbone Grill (La Quinta Inn) in west Loveland at Cascade Avenue and U.S. Highway 34. Participants will have a chance to use a new interactive mapping website, participate in a second survey, and give comments and feedback on their land conservation priorities. Activities for the kids will keep the entire family engaged. The event is free, no registration required.

The full report is posted at www.larimer.org/our_lands_ourfuture.

Scientific survey results

All respondents had visited at least one natural area in Larimer County in the past year. When asked, "If you do not use natural areas or nature-based facilities in Larimer County, what are the reasons?" lack of awareness of natural areas or facilities and lack of time were the top responses.

The top recreation choices were walking/hiking/running on paved and natural surface trails, biking on paved trails or roads, camping, recreating with dogs and fishing. Satisfaction with recreation experiences was high and only hunting and snowmobiling opportunities received less than 60 percent high satisfaction ratings. Respondents were most interested in agencies acquiring additional lands/facilities for walking/hiking/running on natural surfaces and biking on paved trails,

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and supported the use of public funds to make those acquisitions.

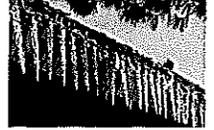
When asked about future priorities for land conservation spending, waterways such as lakes, rivers and streams, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities and trail corridors were respondents' top choices. Regarding funding sources, participants in the survey preferred implementing user fees and extending sales taxes to fund future conservation and management of natural lands and facilities. Respondents also indicated an interest in funding being divided between the acquisition of new natural areas (67 percent) and the management of existing (31 percent) areas similar to the split outlined in the current citizen initiated quarter-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales Tax, which supports conservation and recreation efforts throughout Larimer County.

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Controversial Tree Removal



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Red Mountain Open Space to reopen Friday

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Written by Coloradoan staff

Red Mountain Open Space north of Fort Collins will reopen to the public on Friday.

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The open space, which is owned and operated by the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, closes from Dec. 1 through Feb. 28 each year due to winter weather conditions and to help protect winter range habitat for big game animals such as elk and mule deer.

Information: www.larimer.org/naturalresources

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Slash Pile Burning at Hermit Park

Posted: Feb 25, 2013 10:47 AM MST
Updated: Feb 25, 2013 10:47 AM MST

By Alex Vitale - bio | email

The Larimer County Natural Resources Department will burn slash piles at Hermit Park Open Space (southeast of Estes Park) on Monday, February 25, 2013. Pile burning will continue throughout the week, if weather conditions allow.

Burning piles is part of an on-going wildfire mitigation/forest health project on Larimer County parks and open space properties, involving mechanical thinning, hand piling tree limbs and pile burning. Over 200 piles at Hermit Park Open Space are targeted for burning this winter.

These forest management projects are part of an on-going effort to:

1. Reduce fuel loading to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fires
2. Remove trees damaged by insects and disease
3. Restore forested areas to a healthier forest condition, improving wildlife habitat

To meet safety and regulatory requirements piles are burned after snow storms, when at least three inches of snow is on the ground. Please do not call 911 or local law enforcement, as they are already aware of these burns.

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Smoke from slash burning may be visible

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Smoke may be visible throughout the week near Hermit Park Open Space near Estes Park as crews from the Larimer County Natural Resources Department burn slash piles. Residents are asked to not call 911 if they see smoke.

The burning is part of an ongoing wildfire mitigation/forest health project on Larimer County parks and open space properties that includes tree thinning and piling of limbs. More than 200 piles at Hermit Park Open Space are targeted for burning this winter.

To meet safety and regulatory requirements piles are burned after snowstorms when at least three inches of snow is on the ground.

— Coloradoan staff

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