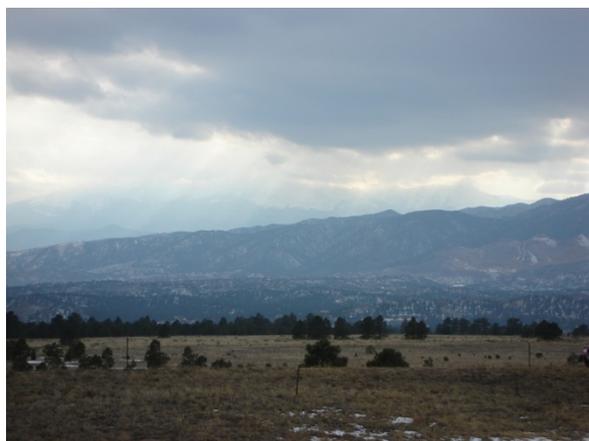


## Colorado rejects limit on seizures of private land for open space

by [Associated Press](#) on February 18, 2015



DENVER — A bipartisan group of Colorado senators rejected a proposal Tuesday to limit government seizures of private land for open space.

The bill would have prevented counties from using eminent-domain laws to seize private land for open space, parks, conservation or preservation of views.

The measure was inspired by a Summit County family that sold a 10-acre parcel on an old mining claim last year after a long court battle with the county. The county used eminent domain to acquire the parcel.

“Personal property rights are so ingrained in this country that we should never be taking land for open space,” said the sponsor of the measure, Sen. Larry Crowder, R-Alamosa.

A Democrat who voted against the proposal said it was too broad. “I think adequate due process is in place” to protect property rights against government seizures, said Sen. John Kefalas, D-Fort Collins.

Two Republicans on the committee joined Democrats in defeating the measure.

One of the Republicans, Sen. Beth Martinez Humenik, said the bill wasn’t necessary.

“This is not something I think is being abused,” she said of counties’ eminent-domain powers.

Earlier this month, a lawyer for Summit County told lawmakers that the parcel near Breckenridge was seized only after lengthy negotiations with the owner. He urged lawmakers not to reduce counties’ ability to seize property with a bill.

“It would eliminate a very seldom used but certainly important tool that counties have to further the public interest and protect important natural resources,” said Summit’s lawyer, Jeff Huntley.

Eminent domain is the ability of government to seize land to promote economic development or build roads and railroads.

In the Summit County case, officials used eminent domain after learning the property owners were driving their ATV up a 1.2-mile, old mining road to their cabin, surrounded by a national forest. The nearest home is a mile away.

“It is such a beautiful place, and we’re trying to protect it,” Huntley told lawmakers earlier this month.

# Years of history, humans live on at Eagle's Nest

Dawn Wilson 7:26 p.m. MST January 28, 2015

As development continues in Fort Collins, opportunities to get into the outdoors within the city become less accessible.



City of Fort Collins residents, however, are lucky to live in an area rich with outdoor opportunities within minutes of home.

One of these beautiful locations is Eagle's Nest Open Space.

Located 30 minutes northwest of Fort Collins near Livermore is Eagle's Nest Open Space. Part of the Larimer County Open Lands Program, this scenic area within the Laramie Foothills encompasses more than 750 acres of rolling hills, scenic views and access to the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River.

In January 2001, the Larimer County Open Lands Program purchased a portion of Eagle's Nest Ranch for \$2 million.

According to the Resource Management Plan for the Eagle's Nest Open Space, the group's goal was to "protect the native vegetation, rock outcrops, and wildlife habitat, while providing outdoor recreational opportunities." An additional 72-acre conservation easement was donated by the landowner for a total property size of 827 acres.

The centerpiece and high point of the open space is Eagle's Nest Rock. Reaching up to 6,353 feet, Eagle's Nest Rock has been a local landmark for centuries.

Folsom points, an ancient, chipped-stone, projectile point sometimes used for hunting, were discovered in the area of Eagle's Nest Open Space. These tools indicate Paleo-Indians moved through the area in search of food beginning 11,000 years ago. Later, the Utes and Arapahoe tribes migrated through the Laramie Foothills region.

In 1843, explorer John Fremont followed the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River, which runs through the valley of Eagle's Nest Open Space, to the Livermore area. Then, in 1887, Catherine L. Chaffee homesteaded Eagle Cliff Ranch.

Since then, at least eight other families or individuals have owned the Eagle Cliff property. In the early 1990s, Eagle Cliff Ranch was sold to Robert Avis, who then sold 755 acres of the lower area of the ranch to the Larimer County Open Lands Program in 2001.

Homesteaders, Native Americans and ranchers weren't the only inhabitants at Eagle's Nest. For more than 100 years, numerous pairs of golden eagles have nested and raised their young on Eagle's Nest Rock. Other smaller nests can also be seen along the rocky edges of the distinct peak.

In addition to golden eagles, the area has a rich diversity of wildlife and plant life throughout the different types of landscapes.

Eagle's Nest Open Space is more than 50 percent grassland with a wide variety of plants, including prickly-pear cactus, bee plant and prickly poppy. Within the next month or two, the early blooming pasque flower will be opening.

Mountain mahogany shrublands are also common, with this shrub of colorful fall leaves dominating the steep slopes of the rock outcroppings and hills.

# coloradoan.com

Mixed in are ponderosa pine, Rocky Mountain juniper and Douglas fir in the woodlands areas.

And along the Poudre River of the valley floor, the riparian environment is abundant with wild plum, chokecherry and plains cottonwood, making it a potentially colorful area in the fall.

These various biomes provide food and shelter for a wide mix of wildlife, including mountain lion, coyote, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bobcat, black bear, elk, rabbits, skunks, small mammals and rattlesnakes. An occasional bighorn sheep has been spotted in the area. Several varieties of native fish, such as Iowa and Johnny darter, white sucker and chubs, live in the Poudre River. And numerous birds flutter throughout the property.

In addition to the golden eagles, depending on the season, look for mountain chickadee, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk, cliff swallow, canyon wren, yellow warbler and kingfisher.

For the Fort Collins resident, Eagle's Nest Open Space provides a wonderful escape from busy life for a quick yet moderate hike through a beautiful landscape.

There are two main trails at Eagle's Nest Open Space for a total of 5.2 miles. The 3-Bar Trail is a 3.4-mile roundtrip loop that starts at the parking lot and heads west along an old ranch road. It continues down into the valley and connects with a spur to take hikers down to the Poudre River. Beautiful views of Eagle's Nest Rock reflect in the water around the ice of the Poudre River this time of year.

The loop back to the parking lot twists along the ridges of the rock outcroppings and heads back up to the parking lot. The elevation gain of about 400 feet rises and falls along the trail between 5,700 feet and 6,100 feet.

At the Poudre River, on the south end of the 3-Bar Trail, is the OT Trail. This 1.8 mile roundtrip loop rises and falls about 200 feet and overlooks the Poudre River.

Hikers and horseback riders alike enjoy this trail for its scenic views and moderate climbs. Leashed pets are also permitted on all trails. Fishing is permitted from the bridge to the private property line to the north and east along the Poudre River. Archery and muzzleloader hunting are permitted at Eagle's Nest Open Space on weekdays during the fall deer and elk seasons. Mountain bikes, rock climbing, camping, rifle hunting, small game hunting, and motorized vehicles, however, are not permitted in Eagle's Nest Open Space.

*Dawn Wilson is a professional photographer and writer and volunteers as a Master Naturalist with the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department. Visit her website at [www.DawnWilsonPhotography.com](http://www.DawnWilsonPhotography.com).*

## **If you go**

Eagle's Nest Open Space is approximately 30 minutes from Fort Collins. Take U.S. Highway 287 north to Livermore. Turn left at The Forks onto Larimer County Road 74E/Red Feather Lakes Road. Go one-third mile and turn left at the sign for Eagle's Nest Open Space. Follow the dirt road up to the parking lot.

Eagle's Nest Open Space is open daily from sunrise to sunset. There is no entry fee. A seasonal closure downstream of the bridge is closed from Feb. 1 to July 15 to protect the nesting eagles.

# Group seeks off-leash area in Larimer County



[Sarah Jane Kyle](#), *The Coloradoan* 9:43 a.m. MST

February 9, 2015

(Photo: Coloradoan library)



## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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There are around 27,500 dogs and cats licensed in Fort Collins and 13,062 in unincorporated Larimer County, according to Larimer Humane Society, which does not differentiate between dog and cat licenses. Larimer County licenses are most commonly dogs, as

cats are not required to be licensed in the county. There were 244 citations and warnings for dogs off leash in Fort Collins Natural Areas in 2014.

A group of dog owners wants to open a 40- to 200-acre off-leash dog area on public land in or near Fort Collins.

[Run Rover Run](#), which has around 180 members on a meet-up site dedicated to the cause, has approached Fort Collins and Larimer County officials seeking support for the idea.

City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Manager Mark Sears said the idea doesn't have much footing — at least if funded, managed or maintained by Fort Collins Natural Areas. Fort Collins identified some possible acquisition sites for a similar project in the last decade, but Sears said none panned out.

Larimer County Natural Resources has left the door open to acquiring land for an off-leash area.

The city of Fort Collins operates three dog parks, which range in size from less than an acre to 3 acres. The Natural Areas department manages 41 sites and more than 36,000 acres of natural area regionally. Larimer County's Open Lands Program has preserved 43,000 acres of land.

Dogs are allowed off-leash in most non-wilderness areas within U.S. Forest Service lands, but must be under voice control. Leashes are required on trails with special regulations and in designated wilderness areas.

Jill Reynolds, a search and rescue dog handler with a master's degree in outdoor recreation, said a dog park isn't the right environment to give dogs the exercise they need and can often be traumatic because of the high number of dogs in a small area.

She believes a designated off-leash area would be an asset to the community but that leash regulations on existing natural areas and trails are appropriate.

"You can play at a dog park, but in a larger area the dogs are safe and they get the chance to run," Reynolds said. "If dogs get that exercise, they're better community members. There's less aggression and territoriality."

Fort Collins Natural Areas recently adopted a master plan for the next decade that states off-leash areas will not be considered, a decision reached through a two-year planning process and surveys of natural areas users.

"People have been very adamant that they do not want us to allow dogs off-leash," Sears said. "It never really came out in the surveys that there was this huge desire for a dog off-leash area."

# coloradoan.com

Sears has met with some members of the off-leash contingent, who approached the department at the tail end of the master-planning process, and is "trying to work with them" to identify other options. That includes petitioning city council and working with the parks department or the county.

"While from our perspective it's a done deal for 10 years, City Council can certainly change our minds," Sears said.

There were 244 citations and warnings for dogs off-leash in Fort Collins Natural Areas in 2014. The number has decreased with an increased ranger presence in the past few years. There were 539 citations and warnings in 2006.

Compliance for dogs on leash is around 90 percent on paved trails and more than 80 percent in natural areas, Sears said.

There are about 27,500 dogs and cats licensed in Fort Collins and 13,062 in unincorporated Larimer County, according to Larimer Humane Society, which does not differentiate between dog and cat licenses. Larimer County licenses are most commonly dogs, as cats are not required to be licensed in the county. Fort Collins requires owners to license cats.

Dogs are allowed on-leash at most natural areas but are banned from others, including sensitive locations like Bobcat Ridge, Soapstone Prairie and Running Deer. Sears said he had looked at some sites that could have become off-leash areas in the past decade, but none panned out.

Run Rover Run founder Lara Jai Gasser, who works in wildlife conservation, said she believes a solution can be found.

"We understand that there are conservation challenges," she said. "But there is enough land here that we can find a place that might not be good wildlife habitat but is suitable for what we want."

Some hope lies with the Larimer County Natural Resources Department, which is in the process of adopting a master plan that would leave the door open to dogs off-leash.

But the idea would still have to overcome logistical challenges to succeed, according to Zac Wiebe, special projects coordinator for the department.

"We would have to consider the management costs of providing such an area, and there would certainly be an impact to natural resource values," he said. "But any potential future acquisitions that we make could be considered for such a purpose."

Larimer County's master plan could be adopted as early as March.

## Fort Collins dog parks

City of Fort Collins owns [three dog parks](#), all less than 3 acres.

- Spring Canyon Dog Park:** A nearly 3-acre fenced area located at the west end of Horsetooth Road in Spring Canyon Community Park.
- Soft Gold Dog Park:** A 1-acre area located at Soft Gold Neighborhood Park, 520 Hickory St.
- Fossil Creek Dog Park:** A  $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre park located at 5821 S. Lemay Ave., the entrance to Fossil Creek Community Park.

## Timnath, Fort Collins work on open space issues



[Adrian D. Garcia](#), *The Coloradoan* 3:13 p.m. MST

February 11, 2015



(Photo: Erin Hull/The Coloradoan)

The idea of urban sprawl someday spilling from Fort Collins and Windsor to Timnath worries some of the town's rural residents.

"It's getting to the point where we're being bombarded by development and buildings," Summerfields resident Rebecca Davis said. "I moved out here (to [Timnath](#)) because of the open space. I had

no desire to live in one big urban community. I like driving out on these county roads and being able to stop and look at cows and horses."

Timnath is a hot spot in Northern Colorado when it comes to growth. There are 2,700 homes platted for Timnath Ranch and Harmony Club, which are south and north of Harmony Road, respectively, and east of Timnath.

At least another 1,200 homes are [planned for the Harmony Ridge](#) subdivision, near Weld County roads 74 and 15, east of Timnath.

Concerns about how Timnath plans to grow while distinguishing itself from larger surrounding communities like Fort Collins and Windsor is a debate often heard at public meetings.

Last fall, Timnath officials — aware of the issue — began talking with Fort Collins about how to keep the two municipalities from colliding.

"It's amazing how fast development is occurring," said Mark Sears, Fort Collins Natural Areas Department manager. "The longer you wait, the less opportunities you have for open space."

About five years ago, Sears helped Fort Collins work with Loveland and Larimer County to preserve thousands of acres between the two cities, he said.

Talks between Fort Collins and Timnath are still in their infancy and not likely to answer questions about growth near their boundary anytime soon, according to Laurie Kadrach, Fort Collins director for community development and neighborhood services.

"An agreement with Windsor took five years to develop," Kadrach said.

Windsor and Fort Collins developed an intergovernmental agreement in 2008 that helps explain how the two towns will split maintenance of the Colorado Highway 392 and Interstate 25 interchange.

# coloradoan.com

It may take Fort Collins longer to develop an IGA with Timnath because of the two municipalities' proximity, Kadrich said. "There's a lot of questions to resolve in some of the area where we have a shared boundary with Timnath along I-25."

Kadrich and a team being formed will help determine where to keep open space, design standards for the area and how to "make sure our communities look different rather than seamless."

Having these discussions are important in the face of Northern Colorado's resurgent growth, Fort Collins resident Lane Trujillo said on Facebook.

"There is clearly a need to control over-development and the housing crisis," Trujillo said. "I agree that there needs to be control of what is being developed, but if we just all (over) limit development and growth our economy that we all love will tank."

Timnath went from 609 residents to 1,543 in the three years leading up to 2014, an increase of 144 percent.

Fort Collins saw population growth increase by more than 7,500 people in that same time to 152,061, a 5 percent increase.

Community separators are key to keeping Timnath, Fort Collins and Windsor from feeling like one big urban community, Timnath Town Manager April Getchius said.

"You drive down there (near Denver) and you don't even realize where you cross boundaries. It's just continuous," Getchius said. "The communities in this area are committed to prevent that."

That commitment was tested last month when Windsor Town Board annexed land east of Timnath, near Weld County roads 74 and 13, and shrunk a land buffer between the two towns from a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to on average of 100 feet. That annexed land holds the future Harmony Ridge development.

Timnath Town Council's request to leave the community separator unchanged was effectively rejected by Windsor Town Board when they voted 7-0 to annex the land.

"Our preference would be to have the community separator remain as originally shown on the current map, as we feel that it is an important buffer between our two communities, and maintains a more agrarian look to the area," Timnath Mayor Jill Grossman-Belisle said in a letter to Windsor's Planning Commission.

Windsor Associate Planner Josh Olhava told the commission the land buffer was not literally defined as  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile wide by Windsor even if that's what Timnath perceived.

Timnath and Windsor will have to work on the details of the IGA they formed in 2008 to sort out details about how to manage the areas near their growth management boundaries, according to Timnath Town Planner Matt Blakely. It's unclear when those discussions will begin.

## Genetically pure bison may call Soapstone home again



[Nick Coltrain](#), The Coloradoan 3:25 p.m. MST

February 10, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy of Scott Burnworth)

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A small herd of genetically pure bison — not seen in Northern Colorado since Abraham Lincoln was president — will again graze the plains of Larimer County this year.

Bison from Yellowstone National Park, a heralded herd for not having intermingled with cattle, are already corralled at Colorado State

University's Foothills campus in west Fort Collins. Come Nov. 1, National Bison Day, researchers and local natural resource stewards plan to release about a dozen of them onto 800 acres of land at Soapstone Prairie and and Red Mountain Open Space.

Once established, they should be viewable from County Road 15, which leads to Soapstone. Their re-introduction will come the year after black-footed ferrets were released in Soapstone and in the middle of plans to bring back cutthroat trout to a nearby stream.

"It really goes back to, how do you reintroduce species that were here originally?" Daylan Figgs, senior environmental planner with the city of Fort Collins said.

The bison will be fenced into their habitat — they fall under the same rules as cattle in Colorado — and Larimer County resource program manager Meegan Flenniken said there will be strong outreach to area ranchers on the program and emergency response plans in place to deal with any wayward bison.

While genetically pure, many Yellowstone bison carry a disease that can create problems with birthing and spread to humans and cattle. Those involved said the artificial breeding program roots out the disease so it won't be carried in the Larimer County herd.

Plans are being laid to expand the program if the herd takes to the prairie, though its too early for phase two details to have been worked out, Figgs said. But if it does succeed, it could mark a milestone for an animal some [U.S. senators have pushed to name "the national mammal of the United States."](#)

"This could be a very important herd for seed stock," CSU reproductive physiologist Jennifer Barfield said.

The program is a collaboration between CSU, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the city of Fort Collins and Larimer County.

## Senate bill to help Colorado conservation easement credit buyers dies

By [David Migoya](#)

[The Denver Post](#)

POSTED: 02/10/2015 09:18:15 PM MST [3 COMMENTS](#) UPDATED: 8 DAYS AGO

[A bill that aimed to offer relief to taxpayers](#) who bought into the early days of Colorado's conservation easement program and were blind-sided years later by hefty penalties was defeated in committee Tuesday.

The bill, SB-130, by Sen. John Kefalas, D-Fort Collins, met with stern opposition from state revenue officials who said taxpayers who purchased millions of dollars worth of easement tax credits were on their own, and the state shouldn't have to fix their errors.

"This bill would place the government in the middle of a financial transaction between two private parties, and that is an area we should not occupy," said John Vecchiarelli, Colorado's director of taxation at the Department of Revenue. "Those responsible should be held accountable and the people of the state should not have to provide that relief."

The Senate Finance Committee voted 5-0 to defeat the measure despite acknowledgments of testimony from taxpayers who were forced to pay as much as 10 times the original amount of their income tax bill.

"It's our obligation to pay taxes so government works, but don't do it in a way that makes me feel robbed," said Julius Medgyesy, who runs Front Range Cancer Specialists in Fort Collins. "We've done nothing wrong in trusting a government program."

At issue were millions of dollars in tax credits given to landowners in return for preserving their property from future development. The tax credits could be sold and taxpayers bought them at a discount and used them against their personal tax liability.

[The first years of the program were not policed by the state](#) and credits were claimed on donations whose underlying appraisals were grossly inflated — some by as much as 166,000 percent, state officials said.

[Credit buyers learned of the abuses and poor appraisals years after they'd already used the credits](#), only to learn they had to pay the state their original tax debt. Worse, the landowners they'd bought the credits from no longer had the cash to repay the buyers and their land was now virtually worthless, stuck in the conservation easement forever.

"We are left taking bankrupt or broke landowners to court to collect money that's no longer there," testified Mark Heiden of Fort Collins. "What's been fair to the credit buyers? Nothing. I've paid 150 percent to the state of what my normal tax liability would have been. The landowners got my money and spent it. The state got the rest."

Senators said they struggled between an obvious injustice and the state's liability to cover the taxpayers' losses.

"This was a troubling afternoon of testimony," said Sen. Mike Johnston, D-Denver. "We have those who supported (a program) and got short-changed on their investment, and that's unfortunate and catastrophic. But the challenge is I can't fit it into the precedent of the state's obligation to correct it for them."

## First purebred bison roam Larimer County since Civil War

CSU process allows disease-free animals to be relocated from Yellowstone

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/10/2015 09:14:53 PM MST [1 COMMENT](#) UPDATED: 8 DAYS AGO



Pure Yellowstone bison, bred at Colorado State University, take a break from grazing in a field to check out visitors near the fence around their pen on Tuesday in Fort Collins. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

**FORT COLLINS** — A rare herd of genetically pure bison will roam the plains in Larimer County later this year for the first time since the Civil War era.

This November, conservationists expect to release 12 bison descended from the last genetically pure wild bison herd in the United States onto 800 acres of Soapstone

Prairie and Red Mountain Open Space. The herd was able to grow through new technology pioneered at Colorado State University.

"It's been over 150 years since the last genetically pure bison roamed the grasslands of Larimer County," Department of Natural Resources director Gary Buffington told the county commissioners during a meeting Tuesday.

"Today, we're here to talk about their return."

Once, wild bison abundantly roamed the land, but they were hunted nearly to extinction. And most of the bison herds that still exist are no longer pure, their genetics weakened over time by crossbreeding with cattle.

But up north, in Wyoming and Montana, a last resource still exists.

"Yellowstone is the last reservoir of pure bison," said Jennifer Barfield, assistant professor at Colorado State University.

However, that herd is stricken with brucellosis, a highly contagious bacterial infection that can spread to and devastate cattle herds and can affect humans. In cattle and bison, the infection hampers reproduction and milk production.

So until Colorado State University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture began working on a new technology that allows them to remove the infection from sperm or embryos, the Yellowstone herd was not a pool for reproduction.

That has changed with the new technology.

Over the past three years, the Fort Collins team has successfully taken embryos from infected mothers, freed them of disease and transplanted them into healthy bison for healthy babies with pure genetics.

Also, they have taken sperm from pure males that are affected by brucellosis, removed the disease, then inseminated healthy mothers.

The result is 12 healthy bison that are genetically pure that will call 800 acres of public land home starting this fall. Researchers will continue to test the bison to make sure they stay healthy.

Most of the fenced acreage will be on Soapstone Prairie, a natural area owned and operated by Fort Collins, but it also will spill onto neighboring Red Mountain Open Space, which is a Larimer County open space.

Eventually, the acreage could more than double, the herd could grow and a trail be built that would allow for safe viewing, said Daylan Riggs of the Fort Collins Natural Areas Department.

But to start, it will be 12 healthy animals this fall, bringing back to Larimer County a natural resource that disappeared 150 years ago.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## First purebred bison roam Larimer County since

CSU process allows disease-free animals to be relocated from Yellowstone *By Pamela Johnson*

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/10/2015 09:14:53 PM MST



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But to start, it will be 12 healthy animals this fall, bringing back to Larimer County a natural resource that disappeared 150 years ago.

## Red Mountain to host limited hunting

Sportsmen can apply for 7 elk, 6 deer permits available for 2015

By **Jessica Benes**

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/18/2015 06:12:27 PM MST



Red Mountain Open Space in Larimer County will offer hunters a drawing for four bull elk permits, three cow elk and six buck deer on March 4. (*Gabriel Christus / Reporter-Herald file photo*)

### Big Game Hunting Special Permits

Larimer County is offering 13 special access hunting permits in 2015. Applications are due by Feb. 28. A drawing for four bull elk permits, three cow elk and six buck deer will be March 4.

Hunters must apply for their license separately through the state of Colorado, and can apply for a permit to each of the three animals.

Permits can be obtained through Larimer County at [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/). The cost is \$10 per application.

For the sixth year, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is offering big game hunting at Red Mountain Open Space, according to Travis Rollins, district manager.

"It's a unique situation to be able to hunt on an open space," he said. "It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

In partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Larimer County is offering 13 special access hunting permits in 2015. Applications are due by Feb. 28. A drawing for four bull elk permits, three cow elk and six buck deer will be March 4.

He said that Colorado Parks and Wildlife evaluates herd populations every year and this year moved up the bull elk allowed permits from two to four, and the buck deer from four to six.

Permits can be obtained through the Larimer County special access hunting permit application process, [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/). The cost is \$10 per application.

Hunters must apply for their licenses separately through the state of Colorado, and can apply for a permit to each of the three animals. Hunters are only allowed a permit for each animal once. After their number is drawn, they can't ever hunt that same animal again at Red Mountain.

# REPORTER-HERALD

"Historically, the Red Mountain Ranch allowed hunting on that property before it became a Larimer County open space," Rollins said. "There's a very healthy deer and elk herd up in that area."



A deer grazes in a field. Red Mountain Open Space in Larimer County will offer hunters six buck deer permits. (*Jenny Sparks / Reporter-Herald file photo*)

He said that because the property is one of their largest, at 15,500 acres, the staff felt it was a great recreation opportunity.

And so far, it has been popular. The department averages 500 to 700 applications every year.

He said that might be because it's a great hunting opportunity "right here in our backyard."

The success rates have been high in successfully harvesting animals, at nearly 75 percent.

"At most county parks and open spaces, you're not allowed to hunt," he said. "Usually, it's more state parks or national forests or private land. This is a very unique situation to be able to hunt on an open space."

He said the limited nature of the special permit also leads to few hunters in the open space and potentially more animals, instead of hunting at a large ranch where there might be hunters everywhere.

Hunters are only allowed to hunt on weekdays and are allowed to go off trail. The hikers and mountain bikers must stay on trail. This helps keep hunters out of the way of weekend recreators to the open space.

"We have not had any conflicts at all between any of the user groups up there," Rollins said.

Hunters must also park at the trailhead and walk in, rather than drive into the backcountry and "walk 100 yards to find elk standing everywhere like in Estes Park," he said.

He said that in 2014, the first female hunter took home a large elk from Red Mountain.

For the special permit drawings, every application is entered in a spreadsheet for that particular animal, and given a number. Then a random number generator is used to select the winning entrants.

"It's a fancy way of pulling names out of a hat," Rollins said.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Loveland, Larimer setting vision for Big Thompson recreation

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/06/2015 02:22:34 PM MST



Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park after the 2013 floods devastated the popular park in the Big Thompson Canyon west of Loveland. (Special to the Reporter-Herald)

Before the 2013 flood, Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park was a haven of greenery and calm tucked alongside the Big Thompson River. Now, it is mud and debris.

Glade Park was a prime fishing and tubing spot, filled with people and laughter on sunny days. Now, it is roped off rocks and downed trees.

The Narrows, the Forks and Sleepy Hollow Parks, popular for fishing and picnicking, also are damaged and closed.

Residents have been wondering how, when and even will Loveland and Larimer County repair these public recreation areas?

The city and county are working together to make a plan on how to handle damaged recreation areas and to look at new opportunities for recreation in the Big Thompson Canyon

### If you go

**What:** A round table public input session to create a vision for recreation and parks in the Big Thompson Canyon after the 2013 floods. Loveland and Larimer County are working together on the vision.

**When:** 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 12.

**Where:** Thompson School District Administrative Offices, 800 S. Taft Ave., Loveland.

Together, they are in the process of an evaluation, which includes gathering public input on what people would like to see in the canyon.

"It's so important to Loveland citizens," said Debbie Eley, open lands specialist for Loveland. "It's the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. Most of the (Big Thompson) corridor is in the county, but it really does affect Loveland residents. People from the city visit these places."

A roundtable meeting is scheduled in Loveland this Thursday for public input.

"We want to bring everyone to the table and hear what everyone wants," said Zac Wiebe, specialist with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

### Recreation in the Canyon

The Big Thompson Canyon draws anglers, artists, wildlife watchers and even hikers and cyclists year round to enjoy its natural wonders.

# REPORTER-HERALD



Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park before the devastating 2013 floods that destroyed the park west of Loveland. (Special to the Reporter-Herald)

The county and city have worked since the 1976 flood to create public access areas. Many of these were pieced together as officials could after parcels and slivers of land that were unsuitable for rebuilding came up for sale.

After the most recent flood, the county and city are working to create a vision, a

Looking ahead will benefit everyone and allow the opportunity to work with the Colorado Department of Transportation during permanent repairs of U.S. 34, said Walt Graul, fishing activist and founder of Friends of the Big Thompson.

"The timing is right to get this done before the road work begins," said Graul. "The potential is there. I'm happy the county has the foresight to look at the design, at what this is going to look like."

While most of the Big Thompson corridor is in Larimer County, Loveland does own property in the canyon, including the 10 acres that were Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park as well as more than a hundred surrounding acres and property near the water treatment plant that are not publicly accessible.

So, the city and the county are splitting the cost of the assessment outside a Great Outdoors Colorado grant. Each will pay \$15,000, and the grant will cover \$37,000, according to information from Larimer County and Loveland.

When finished, the assessment should give both public lands departments a vision for the future of canyon recreation — a document that will help them begin looking for grant money to move the projects off the page.

## **A wild trout resource**

Recreation opportunities include trails, picnic areas, wildlife viewing and, of course, fishing. The Big Thompson River is one of very few left along the Front Range that are wild trout waters, meaning the fish are wild and not stocked.

Graul described it as a special, popular and unique resource to anglers that, on prime fishing days, fills up with anglers before 9 a.m.

The high-demand catch and release area of the river from Waltonia to Estes Park was not hit as badly as lower portions of the river, but the flood did wipe out many fishing access locations and changed the habitat of the river itself.

"It devastated parts of that river, from Drake down," said Graul. "It's just been ruined for trout habitat."

He's hoping the plan will include ways to restore that habitat and access.

"There's going to be potential to make things better than they are now," Graul said.

## **Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park**

One of the areas that will be considered is Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park, located near Round Mountain trail and owned by Loveland. The park could be described as an oasis along the river, popular for picnics, family outings and even weddings.

"For so many people, it's a special place," said Eley.

It's a place that now is unrecognizable; its previous beauty is now buried under debris.

The county also wants to hear what people think about its four parks damaged by the flood — Glade, The Narrows, The Forks and Sleepy Hollow — as well as suggestions for new recreational opportunities and ideas to restore the land and habitat.



The Big Thompson River cut through Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park in the Big Thompson Canyon during the 2013 floods. (Special to the Reporter-Herald)

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Larimer County campsites filling fast



**By Pamela Johnson**  
*Reporter-Herald Staff Writer*

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From the boat-in campsites, Horsetooth Reservoir visitors can see the heavily traveled eastern shore from a less-crowded location. (*Jeff\_Stahla / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)



A hiker looks over a sheltered cove last month where Larimer County offers campsites for boaters. (*Jeff\_Stahla / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)

Campsites throughout Larimer County are already filling up for May, June and July.

Advance reservations are up 50 percent at Carter Lake and 38 percent at Horsetooth Reservoir with only a few sites left for both Memorial Day and July 4 holidays. Spots also are filling up at Flatiron Reservoir and Hermit Park.

"It can be a big shock to people in February to make plans for the Fourth of July," said Brad Frye, reservation specialist for Larimer County.

But the county allows people to start making reservations 180 days in advance, so the window for early July opened in January. Other weekends, too, are filling up, but there are plenty of reservations still open during the week as well as later in the summer.

Larimer County has 350 total campsites available, all of which can be reserved. The sites at Pinewood Reservoir, however, are not yet open for reservations because the county is still working a remodel that will include 15 new electric sites and a natural playscape.

Reservations are filling up at other campgrounds in the area as well. Boyd Lake has 148 sites, all of which can be reserved, while Rocky Mountain National Park has 573 developed sites, of which 449 can be reserved.

The national park also allows backcountry camping, which entails camping in non-developed sites. The fee for backcountry camping is increasing this summer from \$20 to \$26 per permit.

Camping also is allowed on forest service land throughout the Canyon Lakes Ranger District. This area has 53 established campgrounds, all with different numbers of sites, some of which can be reserved and some which are first come, first serve.

The popularity of local sites and increasing population are driving early reservations, according to Frye.

"You've got to plan ahead," he said. "Or plan a midweek stay when the parks are quieter and there are lots of campsites still available."

## Pile burning planned at Larimer County Parks and Open Spaces

BY [NFN](#) ON FEBRUARY 5, 2015 IN [DISPATCHES](#) · [ADD COMMENT](#)

Each winter Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources burns dozens of slash piles – branches and other small diameter wood produced during forest thinning operations – to improve forest health and reduce the threat of wildfire. These burns meet state and local fire regulations.

Hermit Park Open Space, Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Pinewood Reservoir County Park and Carter Lake County Park are the county's priorities for pile burning this winter. The county has targeted about 500 piles for burning this year. "It's good forest management to thin dense stands of trees, it reduces wildfire threats and improves wildlife habitat," said Jeffrey Boring, Larimer County natural resource specialist. But thinning creates a lot of slash and the most practical way of managing slash is to burn it.

Larimer County Natural Resources and Emergency Services Departments will continue to monitor weather conditions and plan pile burns accordingly. The public should expect to see smoke from pile burns following snow events. "We're ready to go, but we're waiting on Mother Nature to give us the green light," Boring said. Any trail closures will be posted at the park or open space trailhead.

To learn more about Larimer County's parks and open spaces, visit our website at [www.larimer.org/naturalresources](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources).

## Larimer County accepting Visual Artist of the Year applications

BY [NFN](#) ON FEBRUARY 18, 2015 IN [DISPATCHES](#) · [ADD COMMENT](#)

Artists of all ages – grab your paint brushes, pencils, and cameras and help inspire public appreciation of open spaces through your art work.

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is seeking professional visual artist applicants for 2015. The selected "Artist of the Year" will have the opportunity to create a piece of visual art inspired by a Larimer County Park or Open Space which they will donate to the county. The Larimer County Natural Resources Department will host a public celebration of the final submitted artwork, display the work for public viewing in a Larimer County building and publicize the selected artist whenever appropriate.

The artist will host one public art-related program to increase the public's appreciation of open spaces through art. For an application and other information, visit [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/openlands/artist.htm](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/openlands/artist.htm)

Applications are due by 4:30 p.m. February 20.

Please contact Diane Roeder at Larimer County Department of Natural Resources at 970-619-4579 or [droeder@larimer.org](mailto:droeder@larimer.org) with any questions.