

Larimer to pioneer ag, water-sharing agreement

Natural Resources Department plans to buy Berthoud farm

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

POSTED: 03/19/2016 12:41:00 AM MDT



The Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board will discuss the acquisition of the Malchow Farm southwest of Berthoud, seen Friday, at its meeting Thursday. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

If you go

- The Larimer County commissioners will vote Tuesday on a loan request that would allow the Department of Natural Resources to borrow \$7.6 million from the Solid Waste Department primarily for acquisition of new properties. The commissioners meet at 9 a.m. at the county offices, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins.

- The Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board will

offer input Thursday on the county's plan to buy the Malchow Farm southwest of Berthoud for \$8.4 million. The advisory board meets at 5 p.m. in the Loveland City Council Chamber, 500 E. Third St.

BERTHOUD -- Larimer County is looking to pioneer water-sharing arrangements and preserve agricultural land with the purchase of a Berthoud property that pioneers once crossed as they headed west on the Overland Trail.

"It's a totally new frontier," said consultant Todd Doherty, whose company, Western Water Partnerships, specializes in pairing farmers and water providers.

"This really is a new paradigm."

The county's Department of Natural Resources hopes to close next month on the 211-acre Malchow farm, which is one mile southwest of Berthoud.

The county will pay \$8.4 million for the land and its water — 240 shares of Colorado-Big Thompson Project and 16 shares of Handy Ditch — with the intention of keeping it an active farm and making the water available to municipal providers in drought years.

The idea of a water-sharing agreement is that, during drought years or years when storage levels are low, users can buy water from the farm while farmers fallow fields or plant dryland crops that do not need irrigation.

This "alternative transfer mechanism" is recommended by the new Colorado Water Plan as a way to protect farms and still meet growing municipal demands for water. In fact, the Colorado Water Conservation Board gave the county \$178,425 to pay for implementation of this water-sharing arrangement.

The state plan calls for this practice to grow, and this first agreement is critical, according to Doherty.

"This will hopefully pave the way so water providers will see the benefits of this type of agreement," Doherty said.

Working farm

This particular irrigated farm is just north of the Little Thompson River and is adjacent to U.S. 287. A tenant farmer currently grows corn, sugar beets and hay.

The soil is rich and the agricultural value is high, and the property also provides a scenic view of Longs Peak and the Rocky Mountains.

The county believes it preserves the rural atmosphere that surrounds Berthoud and notes that the land also includes historic buildings. The Malchow family has described a house built in the 1860s and a barn built in 1907 — a bright red barn visible for miles.

Throughout the years, family members have worked with the Berthoud Historical Society to preserve a beet shack and a pioneer grave site, according to Larimer County.

This property, with its scenic, historical and agricultural highlights, fits several categories that the Department of Natural Resources focuses on for preservation.

The county has preserved some agriculture land in the past, including Long View Farm and River Bluffs Open Space, but this is the largest operation yet, and the first with a water-sharing component, noted land agent Alex Castino.

"Agriculture has been on our list for a number of years," said Gary Buffington, director of the Natural Resources Department.

"Water is always important in Colorado. With the combination of the two, we can make an impact on the community."

County plans

Initially, the county plans to maintain the same agricultural operation as is currently in place. But the types of crops likely will change as the water-sharing agreement takes form.

Ultimately, the property could become a demonstration farm where people can go to learn about agriculture and water issues.

"People who don't have an agricultural background could come out and learn about farming and water issues in the arid West," noted Kerri Rollins, open lands manager. "I don't know exactly what that would look like."

The county has agreed to pay \$8.4 million and hopes that several partners, including Berthoud and Great Outdoors Colorado, will pitch in on the total cost.

In order to have the money for this and other pending acquisitions, the Department of Natural Resources is asking the county commissioners to let them borrow \$7.6 million from the Solid Waste Department.

That money, if approved, along with the \$7.4 million the county currently has to spend on property, will go into a pool that would pay for some parks projects but mostly the top few properties on a list of about 20 that are currently up for sale.

Buffington added, "It's going to be a loan for many uses but primarily for acquisition."

REPORTER-HERALD

Boat inspections required to prevent spread of nuisance species

By Reporter-Herald Staff

POSTED: 03/16/2016 03:11:18 PM MDT

Memorial Day weekend may be the official start of the 2016 boating season, but some Colorado lakes and reservoirs open as early as March 1.

So Colorado Parks and Wildlife is reminding boaters they need to help prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species.

The best way is to be sure a watercraft and all gear is clean, drained and dry in between each and every use, according to a press release. If it can't be drained (e.g. ballast tanks, inboard/outboard or inboard engines) it needs to be decontaminated when moving between locations within 30 days that are positive and negative for aquatic nuisance species, CPW officials said.

The agency requires inspection for all boats that were launched at any time in another state, prior to entering Colorado's waters, and after boating in any waters positive for zebra and quagga mussels, non-native waterflea, New Zealand mudsnail, or Eurasian watermilfoil.

Last year the agency found its highest number of infested mussel interceptions from out-of-state boats, and halted 24 infested boats from contaminating Colorado waters with zebra or quagga mussels.

"A zebra or quagga mussel infestation could make water delivery and infrastructure systems for homes, farms and businesses very expensive," according to Elizabeth Brown, CPW's invasive species coordinator. "Keeping Colorado's waters free of invasive species is also critical to providing high quality fishing and boating opportunities for our residents and visitors."

Mussels can survive out of water for 30 days. If boats move from positive waters to negative waters, the boat must be clean, drained and dry for 30 days or decontaminated.

"The system really works to prevent introductions and movement of ANS by recreational boats," Brown said. "In the last few years, Colorado has been able to take almost all waters off of the positive list for zebra and quagga mussels, while waters in other states, such as in Arizona, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, South Dakota and Lake Powell in Utah, without mandatory inspection and decontamination programs, continue to become infested."

To learn more about boat inspection requirements, call 303-291-7295 or visit <http://cpw.state.co.us/thingstodo/Pages/BoatInspection.aspx>



Silent for decade, Larimer Co. back in land buyer mode



[Stephen Meyers](#), stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com 1:18 a.m. MDT March 16, 2016



(Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

It's been more than a decade since Larimer County purchased a large swath of open land for conservation and recreational use. But with \$7.4 million in the bank for land acquisitions, the county is now poised to purchase 399 acres on the west side of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Larimer County Open Lands program manager Kerri Rollins said the county has been "inundated" with acquisition projects and that plans are in the works to finalize in the next six months the purchase of the property near Lory State Park that contains about a mile of Redstone Creek.

SHARIN' O' GREEN: [14-year-old Geldean wins female race](#)

Rollins said negotiations are ongoing, so the price has not yet been determined. In December, Great Outdoors Colorado awarded Larimer County a \$1 million grant toward the purchase.

"This land certainly has as a lot of value, and it's exciting we have the opportunity to go through with the acquisition," Rollins said. "But, say we buy the property tomorrow, it's not like there will be a trailhead and hiking trails the next day. This is a process."

It's unclear if the 399 acres will be open to the public as an addition to the wildly popular Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, or simply be used for conservation. The property also crosses through the Redstone Canyon Homeowners Association neighborhood.

VIEWPOINTS: [Here's how you can share your opinions](#)

Before any potential parking lots or trailheads are built, two-thirds of the residents in the Redstone Canyon HOA would have to approve of the construction.

"Either way, the land is being conserved and that's a good thing," Rollins said.

Larimer County Parks and Open Lands owns and manages 44,000 acres of open space, mostly purchased since 1996 through the Help Preserve Open Space tax that citizens in 2014 voted to extend to the end of 2043. The tax generates annually about \$8.4 million in revenue.



The parking lot to access Horsetooth Mountain west of Fort Collins fills up Friday, March 11, 2016. The popular open space is routinely packed on the weekends. *(Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)*

Of that revenue, 42 percent goes to the county and 58 percent to the municipalities, such as the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland. Seventy percent of Larimer County's share is mandated to be used for land acquisition and development, 15 percent for land and recreation management and 15 percent for discretionary uses.

Larimer County Parks and Open Lands has used \$33 million of the tax revenue to acquire open lands like Devil's Backbone, Coyote Ridge, Eagle's Nest and Cathy Fromme Prairie. City of Fort Collins Natural Areas contributed to the purchases of Devil's Backbone, Coyote Ridge and Fossil Creek Reservoir. The department also pitched in with Larimer County, The Nature Conservancy and Legacy Land Trust on the massive Laramie Foothills-Mountains to Plains land conservation project, which was awarded an 11.6 million dollar GOCO grant to conserve over 54,000 acres of land north of Fort Collins.

Most of these land acquisitions occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Since then, the purchases have slowed.

REMAINS UNCLAIMED: [Human ashes sit unclaimed at Larimer Co. funeral homes](#)

Fort Collins Natural Areas has shifted its focus to restoration along the urban corridor of the Poudre River, [which will see a major face lift as new development sprouts from Old Town](#). The department has spent about \$3 million a year the past five years for land conservation, purchasing five to 50-acre parcels at a time along the Poudre River. The department has restored riverbanks, reconstructed portions of the Poudre Trail and conserved new acres of wetlands and cottonwood forest at Poudre River natural areas Kingfisher Point, Magpie Meander and McMurray.

Larimer County's last major open lands purchase was in 2004, the \$9.7 million transaction to snag Red Mountain Open Space north of Fort Collins. That same year, Fort Collins Natural Areas purchased adjoining Soapstone Prairie for \$11 million. The Natural Areas department manages the site, which welcomed wild bison to the property last November. The properties combined are more than 32,000 acres.

By 2009, the two massive recreation areas opened to the public as the economy tanked. Larimer County came to property owners to purchase open lands, but property owners held onto their properties as appraised property values fell, Rollins said.

"We've had a lot of discussions with landowners through the years, but when the economy took a downturn people were willing to hold their status for awhile," Rollins said. "The result of that, there have been fewer land purchases the last few years, for sure."

20 MILLION: [Larimer County eyes first behavioral health center](#)

That tide could be turning with the pending purchase of the Horsetooth Mountain Open Space property. The economy has recovered and landowners are motivated to sell, Rollins said.

While she wouldn't share specifics of location or cost, Rollins said several open space properties are available for purchase now.

High priority areas for future conservation in Larimer County include Buckhorn/Redstone, Livermore, the Laramie Foothills, Buckeye (east of Fort Collins) and Blue Mountain, south of the Big Thompson River.

"It's an exciting time for land conservation," Rollins said.



Robert Kintz takes in the view from the summit of Horsetooth Mountain west of Fort Collins Friday, March 11, 2016. Larimer County has plans to acquire 399 acres west of the open space. (Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

Major open lands purchases

1990s

Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area: Acquired in 1994/96 for \$1 million. 240 acres open to public as a buffer between Fort Collins and Loveland

Coyote Ridge Natural Area: Acquired in 1994-97 for \$1.8 million. 839 acres open to public for mountain biking and hiking in transition zone between grasslands and montane forests

Hughey Open Space: Acquired in 1998 for \$310,000. The 282 acres of the former Hughey property is managed as part of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

2000s

Prairie Ridge Natural Area: Acquired in 2000 for \$3.1 million. 792 acres managed by city of Loveland, and not open to the public, is a natural buffer between Fort Collins and Loveland

Eagles Nest Open Space: Acquired in 2001 for \$2 million. 755 acres open to public, along the North Fork of the Poudre River, with views of the Laramie Foothills.

Culver Open Space: Acquired in 2003 for \$1.5 million. 287 acres not open to public, for conservation of adjacent Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Red Mountain Open Space: Acquired in 2004 for \$9.7 million. 13,500 acres open to public for hiking and mountain biking on rolling grasslands, sandy washes and red rocks

River Bluffs Open Space: Acquired in 2004 for \$1.9 million. 161 acres open to public, along the Poudre River west of Windsor.

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area: Acquired in 2004 for \$11 million. 18,728 acres open to the public for hiking, mountain biking and bison viewing on expansive grasslands

Potential future recreation areas

Long View Farm: Still an active farm since being purchased in 1997 for \$2.3 million, the 478-acre site between Fort Collins and Loveland could someday be converted to recreational use. Soon, however, people will be able to ride their bikes near the area when the 4.4-mile [Long View Corridor Trail](#) is built, connecting the two cities. Construction begins this summer, with completion set for 2017. The bike trail will connect Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area on Shields Street to where the Loveland Recreation Trail ends at 57th Street.

Chimney Hollow: Open occasionally for public tours, this 1,874-acre property west of Carter Lake was purchased for \$3.8 million in 2004. It would become a go-to water recreation destination should the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District build a reservoir on adjacent lands.

Red-tail Ridge: Purchased in 2000 for \$951,559, this 320-acre future open space located along the Little Thompson River in south Larimer County would link with Boulder County's Rabbit Mountain Space

REPORTER-HERALD

Devil's Backbone Open Space reopening Saturday



[Stephen Meyers](#), stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com 9:29 a.m. MST March 12, 2016



(Photo: Elliott Foust/For the Coloradoan)

The Devil's Backbone Trailhead is reopening on Saturday [after being closed for about a month due to construction](#).

The trailhead, located west of Loveland just off U.S. Highway 34, is the southern access point for the popular Devil's Backbone Open Space. The trailhead and adjacent trails were closed since February to allow construction crews to expand and reconfigure the trailhead and parking area.

The Wild Loop and Morrison Loop trails will also reopen on Saturday, a day forecast with a high of 68 degrees.

Crews will continue to work at the trailhead for the next few weeks, but no additional closures are expected.

OUTDOORS: [Red Mountain, Soapstone Prairie to open Tuesday](#)

The remodeled trailhead is one of several improvements for Devil's Backbone in 2016. Further improvements coming this spring and summer include:

- A multi-use equestrian and mountain bike trail through the Hidden Valley area of the open space
- Designation of the Wild Loop Trail as hiking only
- A webcam on the parking area
- Additional interpretive materials and play features

REPORTER-HERALD

Larimer County working on open space projects

By Reporter-Herald Staff

POSTED: 03/09/2016 08:18:59 PM MST

Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources has a variety of projects underway in its open space areas, and reported access will be closed at some areas.

A new information center and shop facility are being built at Horsetooth Reservoir and are scheduled to open this summer. Access is not impacted at this time for visitors to the South Bay area.

The Devil's Backbone Trailhead expanded parking is set to be complete by mid-March. There is currently no trail access from the trailhead during construction.

At the Soderberg Trailhead, work will be going on through May on a new horse trailer parking lot. That project may involve temporary weekday closures.

The parking lot at the Lions Open Space will be closed until at least April 22 as work is done to stabilize the riverbank and enhance fish habitat in the Poudre River. The Pleasant Valley Trail and fishing access remain open.

The department also reported temporary closes to fishing access downstream of the bridge at Eagle's Nest Open Space and river access downstream from the parking lot at River Bluffs Open Space. Those closures will protect nesting raptors.

THE DENVER POST

New visitor center for Horsetooth

By Reporter-Herald

POSTED: 03/05/2016 12:01:00 AM MST [ADD A COMMENT](#)

UPDATED: 03/05/2016 02:02:18 AM MST

HORSETOOTH RESERVOIR — A new information center will serve as "a front door" to Horsetooth Reservoir as well as Horsetooth Mountain and Soderberg Open Spaces and the Blue Sky Trail.

"We will have a better way to connect with our visitors," said Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth district manager for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. "We can invite them in."

Construction is underway on an information center and office building at the entrance to South Bay at Horsetooth Reservoir, as well as a nearby workshop and storage facility that will provide office space, meeting rooms and a place for people to learn about recreation opportunities.

The \$5.4 million project, one of the last that was part of the 2007 parks master plan, is expected to be completed and open by mid-June. The money is drawn in even amounts from the county's park user fees, lottery conservation dollars and open space sales tax revenue.

Read more of the story [New visitor center for Horsetooth](#) at [ReporterHerald.com](#).

REPORTER-HERALD

Larimer building visitor center at Horsetooth

New offices, information center to open in June

By *Pamela Johnson*, Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 03/03/2016 08:00:00 AM MST



Jose Sifuentes, back, and Alex Rodriguez, are installing a frame so crews can pour a concrete wall on the information center under construction at Horsetooth Reservoir. The men are part of a crew from Pierson Concrete. (Pamela Johnson / Loveland Reporter-Herald)



A new workshop, foundation in the foreground, with office space will join a more than 7,000-square foot center that will replace a small modular building, pictured in the background, that contains all the current offices at the reservoir. (Pamela Johnson / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

HORSETOOTH RESERVOIR — A new information center will serve as "a front door" to Horsetooth Reservoir as well as Horsetooth Mountain and Soderberg Open Spaces and the Blue Sky Trail.

"We will have a better way to connect with our visitors," said Mark Caughlan, Horsetooth district manager for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

"We can invite them in."

Construction is underway on an information center and office building at the entrance to South Bay at Horsetooth Reservoir as well as a nearby workshop and storage facility, that will provide office space, meeting rooms and a place for people to learn about recreation available at the reservoir and surrounding open spaces and trails.

The \$5.4 million project is one of the last that was part of the 2007 parks master plan and is expected to be completed and open by mid-June. The money is drawn in even amounts from the county's park fund (user fees), lottery conservation dollars and open space sales tax revenue.

Currently, a staff of 40 during the height of summer work out of an old, crowded modular on site that will be retired once construction is complete. The workers include rangers, gate attendants, a trail crew and the county's open lands construction crew.

The new Horsetooth Information Center will serve as a hub with more than 7,000 square feet of space including a meeting room, a public porch with a view of the reservoir and tons of information about recreation, the history of the area and the Colorado-Big Thompson Water Project, wildlife, fisheries and more.

One piece is a 3-D map of the area that will highlight different recreational opportunities throughout the area including the Foothills and Blue Sky Trails. The plan is to make it interactive in that visitors will be able to push a button about a topic, such as rock climbing or swimming, and the associated recreational areas will light up.

The information center is at South Bay right between camping and day use areas.

This is the first real public building that Horsetooth has had since the reservoir opened in 1954, according to Caughlan, and the parking lot will hold up to 30 vehicles. He described it as a gateway not just to the reservoir, the third busiest in the state, but also to the open spaces and surrounding trails, all of which draw an estimated 1 million visitor days per year.

Construction kicked off in January, and crews are currently working on the foundation and basement walls. General contractor, Heath Construction of Fort Collins, and subcontractors plan to continue building over the next several months, weather permitting.

"I'm excited about it," said Gary Buffington, director of the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. "I hope for some decent weather this spring to get it open."

REPORTER-HERALD

Open space areas reopen for season

By Reporter-Herald Staff

POSTED: 03/02/2016 07:36:19 PM MST

Red Mountain Open Space, located north of Fort Collins, Soapstone Prairie Natural Area north of Wellington and Hermit Park Open Space southeast of Estes Park reopened for the season on Tuesday.

Red Mountain Open Space is open to the public from sunrise to sunset from March 1 to Nov. 30. The Larimer County area closes each year from December through February due to winter weather conditions and to protect winter range habitat for big game animals, such as mule deer, elk and bighorn sheep.

All trails at Soapstone Prairie are open, and visitors may be able to see the bison that were reintroduced to the area last year.

Hermit Park will see a limited opening with portions of the campgrounds and cabin loop opening for the season. The road through Hermit Park Open Space will be open to vehicles up to the group pavilion and Kruger Rock trail parking areas. Visitors may still access the Homestead Meadows Connector trail via foot, bike or horse.

Hermit Park will open fully on April 1. It closes each year from mid-December through February due to winter weather conditions and to protect winter range habitat for animals such as elk.

For details about open space areas, visit larimer.org/naturalresources.

REPORTER-HERALD

Larimer County delays action on open lands loan

POSTED: 03/01/2016 09:46:32 PM MST

FORT COLLINS — After a 60 minutes of closed meeting on acquisition opportunities for the Department of Natural Resources, the Larimer County commissioners made no decision on a loan request Tuesday.

The department is seeking a nearly \$8 million loan from the Solid Waste Department that would allow the county land agency to buy more than one open space property that is currently for sale. The department has \$7.4 million available for purchases but would need nearly double that to complete all the potential acquisitions that are currently being discussed.

Details on the land the county may buy also were discussed during that closed session Tuesday. Officials have not disclosed much information, only that one is close to Fort Collins and the second is a farm property near Berthoud.

The Solid Waste department will still have \$15 million in reserves as well as other money set aside specifically to close the landfill in the future if the commissioners approve the loan. A decision is expected next week.

REPORTER-HERALD

At 20 years old, Larimer County's open lands program shows no sign of slowing down

By *Pamela Johnson*, Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/28/2016 04:27:04 PM MST



Paul Guerrero, left, Thomas Ptack, center, and Eleseo Sotol, right, with Hoff Construction build a form before pouring concrete Wednesday in the parking area of Devil's Backbone open space west of Loveland. (*Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)

The rugged beauty of the Devil's Backbone, the rolling prairies at Soapstone, the quiet trails and fishing ponds at River's Edge are a few of the very visible, tangible rewards residents have seen during the first 20 years of an open space sales tax.

But the gems behind the scenes include the partnerships that provided grants and opportunities for outdoor recreation, the community engagement

and the protected land that will live on for future generations.

"Larimer County is the leading open space program in the state," said K-Lynn Cameron, former open lands manager who spearheaded the initial tax approved by voters 20 years ago and helped build the current program.

"It's gone beyond the dreams that I had."

During the first 20 years of collection, which started in 1996, the quarter-cent tax has brought in \$179.5 million, which has been shared between unincorporated Larimer County, Loveland, Fort Collins Estes Park, Berthoud, Wellington, Windsor, Johnstown and Timnath, based on population and sales tax generation. The money pays for buying land as well as maintaining and operating open spaces and natural areas.

Celebrating 20 years

Larimer County will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax and the accomplishments that have been made with that money. A slate of new education programs, volunteer projects, a celebration and a brand new passport program are on tap this spring and summer.

The passport program, which is expected to kick off this spring, is like a treasure hunt that will challenge residents to visit eight different open spaces within the county and locate two specific metal plates at each. Clues and directions will lead residents to plates, one easier and one more difficult to find. Participants can then take a rubbing of each unique image, designed specifically for this program, and learn about the history and wildlife of the area.

The county will offer prizes for those who find a specific number of passport plates.

Additional details on the passport program as well as the education and volunteer efforts for the 20th anniversary will be released in coming months. Details will be posted at www.larimer.org/openlands/openspaces20th/

Larimer County's share tallies up to \$75 million, and using a portion of that, the Department of Natural Resources, has conserved 44,000 acres, including 25,000 acres with public access and 87 miles of multiuse trail.

The county has partnered with other cities and towns to conserve another 11,000 acres.

Fort Collins has collected the second largest piece, \$64 million, followed by Loveland at nearly \$29 million.

With its share, Loveland has conserved 7,345 acres with public access on 758 currently and more public access and purchases to come in the future.

Officials and residents who worked to get the sales tax passed created it with partnerships and regional land preservation in mind.

That is why they crafted the tax to be shared, and that forethought led to situation we have today — acres of protected land shared by cities and towns and enjoyed by residents from throughout the region.

"That sharing of money made the program even stronger," said Cameron.

Marilyn Hilgenberg, Loveland's open lands and trails manager agrees.



Larimer County's Passport Program will feature 16 unique metal plates, like those pictured here for Hermit Park and Devil's Backbone, for residents to find and take a crayon or pencil rubbing. The program will continue well beyond the 20th anniversary year. (Pamela Johnson / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

"There's power in collaboration," she said. "We've shared resources to gain the best resources for all of Larimer County."

By working together and partnering on projects, the cities, towns and county have been able to use the county tax receipts as the local money required for some grants and additional resources. Larimer County reports that 47 cents have been leveraged on every sales tax dollar, and the county as a whole ranks among the top in the state for receiving Great Outdoors Colorado Grants.

Those partnerships have led to some of the shining gems of the region, as identified by natural areas specialists — Soapstone Prairie and Red

Mountain Open Space, quiet areas north of Fort Collins that are now home to a conservation herd of bison, Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area between Loveland and Fort Collins and the Devil's Backbone west of Loveland.

Opened in 1999, Devil's Backbone is one of the most popular open spaces in the county, a busy site year-round because of its beauty and proximity to Loveland. It is owned and managed by Larimer County, but other partners including Loveland and Fort Collins pitched in money to help buy the land and to accomplish improvements and expansions.

This area now connects by trail to Fort Collins' Coyote Ridge Natural Area, and is in the midst of a \$360,000 upgrade that will include 35 new parking spaces, a natural play area and a new 1.25-mile trail loop in Hidden Valley.

Again, Larimer County and Loveland are partnering on the current project with the county paying \$241,000 and the city kicking in \$118,500.

Two other upcoming projects in the Loveland area are possible due to these types of partnerships. The city paid the bulk of the price tag for 185 acres south of Loveland, known as the Ryan Gulch parcel, but Larimer County and Berthoud also contributed to buying the property, which will provide a link in the Front Range Trail that ultimately will create a north-south trail across the state.

Sunset Vista is another Loveland natural area, located at the northeast corner of 57th Street and Taft Avenue, that relies upon partnerships and will provide a section of regional trail to connect Loveland and Fort Collins. Construction there should begin this fall.

Both Larimer County and Loveland also have several opportunities to buy new properties, though details are not yet public.

"We have more land acquisition opportunities now than we've ever had before," said Kerri Rollins, the county's open lands manager.

Rollins acknowledged that all the possibilities would cost much more than is available. In fact, the Department of Natural Resources is seeking an \$8 million loan from the Solid Waste Department to allow the purchase of several pieces of land. That will be before the commissioners for approval early next month.

Larimer County has purchased one flood parcel in Cedar Cove, and an overall Big Thompson Canyon recreation plan identifies that as a prime area for future recreation and conservation. And the county has been discussing buying land to expand Horsetooth Mountain Open Space west of Fort Collins.

Again, no details have been firmed up for either project.

The tax, which was approved in 1995, extended in 1999 and then approved again in 2015 for another 25 years, also has allowed cities and the county to engage residents as volunteers and through education programs.

It led to a study that looked at gaps in resources and ways to connect future generations to the outdoors and a new initiative that, working with the Poudre School District, Loveland and Boys and Girls Clubs of Larimer County, will identify and eliminate specific barriers for connecting youth with the outdoors. This Inspire Initiative is tied to a \$25 million pot of GoCo money.

Plus there are the ties to agriculture and the land protected in perpetuity.



Rollins added, "My inspiration is the impact I see this tax having around the county and the difference it makes in the lives of each and every citizen."

Construction crews from Connell Resources Inc. work Wednesday moving dirt and laying down recycled asphalt in the parking lot of Devil's Backbone open space west of Loveland. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

REPORTER-HERALD

Larimer County considers inter-department loan to buy open space

Natural resources seeking loan from landfill

By *Pamela Johnson*, Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/28/2016 08:57:31 PM MST

If you go

What: Larimer County Commissioners administrative matters meeting. Officials will talk about an internal loan for the Department of Natural Resources during a closed session.

When: 9 a.m. Tuesday.

Where: County offices, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins.

The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is looking to borrow \$7.6 million from the landfill to buy and preserve property in Larimer County.

The money would help the county buy several different properties that are available for purchase now, explained Kerri Rollins, open lands director.

The specifics on those properties — the size, location and cost — have not been publicly discussed. However, Natural Resources Director Gary Buffington confirmed that one property is near Fort Collins and the other is agricultural land in the Berthoud area.

Resident Peggy Malchow Sass, at a recent public meeting, described that farm, which has been in her family since the 1960s, and urged the county to overcome "a snag in the financing" so the land can be protected.

"Both of my parents would be so deeply pleased to have the farm purchased for open space and preserved that way," Malchow Sass said before the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board on Thursday.

She described how her parents loved the farm and how they loved history, loved genealogy and loved the land.

"While none of us kids stayed on the farm as an occupation, it's dear to our hearts," she said.

The history there is rich beyond family ties, she added. A section of the Overland Trail, on which settlers traveled, crosses the land, and along it sits the grave of an unknown person believed to have died while crossing the trail.

The property also includes a barn built in 1907, Malchow Sass said.

"It's a beautiful old structure," she said. "My grandmother's house was built in the 1860s. It may be the ranch house or saloon referred to in some accounts of the Overland Trail."

The "snag in financing" that the department of natural resources is facing is that it has more than one property available for purchase now, and the \$7.4 million the department has in the bank for acquisitions is not enough to cover the cost of all of the potential purchases.

"The properties are available now," Lori Smith, senior accountant for the department, said at the Thursday meeting. "Landowners are motivated now."

That is why natural resources would like to borrow the money from the Solid Waste Department — an option natural resources has used in the past — and repay it over the next 10 years as more open space tax revenue comes in.

Solid Waste Director Stephen Gillette confirmed that his department has the \$8 million in the bank for the other county department to borrow.

The loan, if approved, would be paid back over 10 years with interest.

The rate of interest would match the amount that the money would be earning from the bank, which currently is about 0.71 percent. Projections are that rate would not exceed 2 percent during the life of the loan.

"Borrowing internally is a lot less expensive," Smith said.

"The loan won't impact (solid waste's) purpose. They have money they have set aside to close the landfill."

The solid waste department is an enterprise fund, which means that it operates on money generated from user fees and does not receive tax money from the county's general fund. The department must set aside the money it needs to operate and maintain the landfill, even after it closes in the future.

The natural resources department operates on a mix of user fees and tax money. A large portion of its budget comes from a voter-approved quarter-cent sales tax, a portion of which is for new land and a portion for maintenance.

While natural resources would be paying interest on this loan and the purchases would mean less money for acquisitions in coming years, the rate is low, and the opportunities are now, officials said.

Five years ago, the natural resources department borrowed \$1.2 million from the landfill to match grants that were available to complete improvements at Horsetooth Reservoir and Carter Lake. The remaining balance on that loan, \$415,713, would be rolled into the new loan for a total owed of \$8 million.

Looking at projected open space sales tax revenue, county officials report they would have the money to repay the loan over the next decade.

Open lands officials will explain the details to the Larimer County commissioners in an executive session on Tuesday, and the elected board will be asked to approve the loan in early March.

REPORTER-HERALD

Colorado Bluebird Project expands to Loveland with grant

Larimer County awards small grants to 12 projects

By *Pamela Johnson*, Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 02/28/2016 04:23:19 PM MST

This spring, bluebird boxes will be placed at Devil's Backbone Open Space thanks to one of 12 small grants and a 12-year-old from Fort Collins who wanted to promote birds to cut down on mosquitoes and the diseases they carry.

Noah Spagnuolo and his Colorado Bluebird Project received \$1,586 on Thursday from the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources as part of its Small Grants for Community Partnering program. His was one of 12 grants, totaling \$20,748, awarded during the county's open lands advisory board meeting.

The county has provided these small grants since 1996 with a portion of the money collected through a quarter-cent open space sales tax. The grants go to gardens, research, agriculture, education and other projects that benefit land and nature.

"It gets the sales tax money into a lot of the other communities in Colorado," said Larimer County Commissioner Steve Johnson, while awarding grants from Red Feather Lakes to Loveland. "The money is so important for those small projects."

This is the second year in a row that Noah received a grant through the program for his bluebird project.

"It's been going very successfully," the 12-year-old told the commissioners Thursday.

Last spring, Noah and his family, working with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, the natural resources department and a team of volunteers, [placed 17 bluebird boxes at Horsetooth Mountain and Soderberg Open Spaces](#) to provide nesting habitat for the birds.

Noah was inspired to create the project by his aunt, who nearly died from a viral condition believed to be spread by mosquitoes and who is a natural resources educator in Castle Rock. He had learned about bluebird boxes from his aunt and wanted to help spur the bluebird population because they dine on mosquitoes among other delicacies.

Bluebirds nest in old trees and wooden fence posts, but their natural habitat has been declining and can be replaced by specially designed wooden nesting boxes.

Laura Quattrini, who works for the bird conservancy, helped Noah with the location and installation of the boxes as well as tracking the data, which is collected by a team of volunteers who literally go to the sites and check the boxes for nesting birds.

Last year, the first, several swallows nested in the boxes, and bluebirds are expected to follow. Bird experts have said it usually takes a few years for the nesting population of bluebirds to follow.

Noah initially came up with the idea as a research project for his school, and then he took the concept off the paper and into nature. With Quattrini's help, he received a community partnering grant in 2015 for the boxes west of Fort Collins, and again this year, the duo received a Larimer County grant to expand the project to the Devil's Backbone.

Other grants include: \$2,000 for a demonstration garden in Fort Collins, \$2,000 for signs for Colorado Youth Outdoors, \$1,372 for a community garden in Estes Park and \$2,000 for a shed to house telescopes for the Little Observatory at Soaring Eagle Ecology Center in Red Feather Lakes.

Student Kate Wilkins also received \$2,000 to help her research project on genetically pure wild bison that are living on public land north of Fort Collins. Her team will look at how the bison impact bird and mammals, habitat and vegetation, and the grant will help pay for a research assistant.

Wilkins said, "This grant means the world to me."



Coulson: Kick off spring fishing with free fishing expo

Dave Coulson 7:22 a.m. MST February 28, 2016

The warmer days have me thinking, with greater frequency, about fishing. I recognize that in my case that's difficult to envision, but the reality is I haven't ice fished this year and the cold has kept this angler indoors most of the winter. That's fast changing as I noticed a neighborhood pond is nearly ice free and a number of reports I've read on FishExplorer.com indicate many Denver Metro waters have open fishing opportunities, including Cherry Creek and Chatfield Reservoirs. Yep, open water fishing is just around the corner.

Now if the warming weather hasn't put you in the fishing mood, then the events of the next three weekend should do it. March 5-6 is the 12th Annual Larimer County Department of Natural Resources Fishing Expo. The following weekend, on March 13, we switch over to Daylight Savings Time, meaning evening fishing during the week is once again a viable option. Finally, spring officially starts March 20 and spring offers some of the best fishing of the year for me.

There's nothing like a good fishing show to shake off the winter doldrums and get a person into the mood to spend more time outdoors. And our very own fishing expo offers plenty to get an angler excited about hitting the water. The Expo is held in the First National Bank Building at The Ranch, Loveland, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday. And the best part is it's free.

If the free admission isn't enough to motivate you to attend, the events, seminars and vendor booths make this a must-see event for area anglers. Each day there will be a casting contest hosted by Chad LaChance, owner of Fishful Thinker. Chad is one of the area's top anglers with his own television show. In addition to the contest, Chad is also doing a couple seminars each day on fishing local waters. It's a great time to learn from one of the best.

Other great anglers doing presentations are Nate Zelinsky, one of the best walleye and northern pike guides in the region. He'll be doing presentations on evening/night, spring and fall fishing tactics. While they'll be oriented to walleye, don't miss them as the information is applicable to all species. Boat anglers will want to take in Dan Swanson's program on getting the most out of your electronics. And Steve Schweitzer, author of "Fly Fishing Rocky Mountain National Park," will do a presentation on fly fishing high country lakes.

Not enough? Well, there's a kids casting contest being hosted by Centennial Bass Club. Area tackle shops will be putting on fly casting demonstrations, and I'm rather sure they'll be happy to let you try out their rods. Plus, you'll be able to visit the vendor booths and be tempted by all their offerings for the upcoming year. You'll also want to visit the Larimer County Parks, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the numerous fishing club booths. You'll be able to get information on the latest happenings around the area and maybe even find a new fishing partner or two.

After the fishing expo, you'll be fully primed to take advantage of the open waters brought about by warmer weather. Not only that, over the next couple weeks the combination of Daylight Saving Time and spring will mean plenty of daylight hours, both during the week and weekends, to fish.

It's been a long, cold winter and I'm more than ready for the open water season, and the Larimer County Fishing Expo is a great way to kick it off.

REPORTER-HERALD

Experts offer fishing advice at Larimer County expo

Free event scheduled March 5-6 at The Ranch

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

POSTED: 02/26/2016 11:42:07 PM MST



In this photo from last year's Larimer County Natural Resources Fishing Expo at The Ranch, Adam Omernick with Zen Fly Fishing Gear (with fishing pole) explains to Rusty Bloyd of Loveland how to extend the 12-foot-long tenkara style fly rod. (Jessica Benes / Loveland Reporter-Herald file photo)

If you go

What: Larimer County Department of Natural Resources Fishing Expo with seminars, demonstrations, adult and youth casting contests and outdoor vendors.

When: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 5, and 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Sunday, March 6.

Where: First National Bank Building at The Ranch, the county's fairgrounds and events complex.

Cost: Free

Speakers:

- Nathan Zelinsky, Colorado fishing guide, early evening and night fishing tactics, 10 a.m. March 5 and 1:30 p.m. March 6.
- Chad LaChance, Dan Swanson and Ronny Castiglioni, fishing on busy weekend days, 11 a.m. March 5 and 12:30 p.m. March 6.
- Zelinsky, spring and fall fishing tactics, noon March 5 and 11:30 a.m. March 6.

- Swanson, sonar class that focuses on getting the most out of electronics, 1 p.m. March 5
- LaChance, fishing changing reservoirs and lakes, 2 p.m. March 5 and 10:30 a.m. March 6.
- Steve Schweitzer, angler and author, fly-fishing at high altitudes, 3 p.m. March 5.
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife fish biologist, 10 a.m. March 6.

LOVELAND -- Larimer County's reservoirs provide abundant fishing opportunities, but the best techniques to catch fish vary depending on the circumstances.

The factors include the fluctuation of water levels, which during the summer can drop by a foot a day, the different food sources based on the species and vegetation in the reservoirs and even the number and types of boats on the water.

"Some of the best fishing in the west is at Horsetooth and Carter Lake," noted Mark Caughlan, park manager with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

"But our reservoirs are difficult to fish because of the massive water level fluctuation."

He wants to help the anglers who enjoy the reservoirs learn different techniques and tools to take advantage of the unique circumstances. So 12 years ago, he launched the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources Fishing Expo to bring experts, anglers and vendors together to share knowledge and a sport they love.

"I learn something every time I'm there," said Brian Modrowski, who lives in Larimer County and fishes the reservoirs here. "I've used and succeeded with (speakers') techniques. ... I learn something new every time I go."

Chad LaChance, an expert fisherman who hosts the television program "Fishful Thinker," speaks at angling events and is a guide, has presented at the expo every year.

The first year, the crowd was small, composed of hard-core anglers, he said. Now, the event has grown and includes activities for families, plus vendors that represent many different outdoor activities.

Last year, an estimated 3,000 people attended over the two days of the expo, Caughlan said. He expects similar crowds this year, particularly with two days of renowned speakers who are willing to share their expertise at the free event.

LaChance and his guiding partners will focus on fishing reservoirs with changing conditions and weekend fishing patterns.

Not only will fish behave differently and frequent different locations depending on the water levels, habits also vary based on the other aquatic life in the reservoirs and the types of activities on the water, LaChance said.

For example, on weekends when there are more boats, people and activities such as water skiing, fish locations and behaviors are different, he said.

Anglers focus on food sources to find and catch fish, and those also change in reservoirs that are made for water storage versus natural lakes. For example, walleyes and rainbow trout do not typically live in the same waters naturally, but they do in stocked reservoirs.

"A walleye in Lake Erie might eat two different kinds of fish in its whole life," LaChance said. "Here in Colorado, it might eat five different things a day because it has access."

The desire to share that knowledge led Caughlan to create and grow the fishing expo and, through partnerships, offer top speakers without charging admission. His goal, as with his career in natural resources, is to share the outdoors with residents.

REPORTER-HERALD

Hunting permits to be offered for Red Mountain Open Space

By Reporter-Herald Staff

POSTED: 02/24/2016 09:11:55 PM MST

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources will offer limited big game hunting opportunities at Red Mountain Open Space this year.

In partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Larimer County will offer 19 special access hunting permits, including four bull elk, three cow elk, six buck deer and six doe pronghorn, according to a press release.

The open space is near the Colorado-Wyoming border.

Applications for permits will be accepted through Feb. 29, and a drawing for the permits will be held the first week of March.

Successful applicants will be contacted by phone and email.

The cost is \$10 per application.

To apply or for details, visit www.larimer.org/naturalresources.



Temporary closure at Lions Open Space starts Feb. 22

BY [NFN](#) ON FEBRUARY 19, 2016 IN [DISPATCHES](#), [LAPORTE](#) · [ADD COMMENT](#)

Work to stabilize the Poudre River bank will close the parking area at Lions Open Space in LaPorte starting Feb. 22.

Lions Open Space is home to the westernmost portion of the Poudre River Trail, which continues west as the Pleasant Valley Trail. The Pleasant Valley Trail will remain open during construction but will be rerouted away from the Cache la Poudre River. Visitors may access Lions Open Space via the trail during construction.

The Lions Open Space parking area is expected to reopen April 22. The reroute of the Pleasant Valley Trail will remain in effect until the fall of this year.

The temporary closure to the parking area is the result of improvements coming to Lions Open Space, including stabilizing the bank of the Poudre River and repairing about a 20-foot section of the Pleasant Valley Trail that was damaged during previous flood events. This work will be done in two phases.

During the first phase of construction, which starts Feb. 22, crews will install boulders and other rocks along the shoreline to stabilize the riverbank. Also, in the Poudre River itself, they will install rock clusters to improve fish habitat and lines of rock to slow the river's velocity and reduce the potential for erosion of the riverbank.

The second phase of construction is scheduled to take place in late summer or early fall, after spring runoff when the water level of the Poudre River subsides. It will include re-vegetation and soil work on the restored riverbank, as well as repairs to the damaged section of the Pleasant Valley Trail.

Updates on construction and reopening of the Lions Open Space parking area will be posted on Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' website, larimer.org/naturalresources. For questions or more information, please contact Jeffrey Boring, resource specialist, at 970-619-4569 or jboring@larimer.org.

REPORTER-HERALD

Deadline nears for Visual Artist of the Year

By Reporter-Herald Staff

POSTED: 02/17/2016 05:51:20 PM MST

The deadline is nearing to apply for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' Visual Artist of the Year program.

Artists of all ages are being invited to apply.

The chosen artist for 2016 will receive a free annual entrance permit and have the opportunity to create a piece of visual art inspired by one of Larimer County's parks or open spaces.

The artist is expected to donate the artwork to Larimer County upon its completion, and to host one public art-related program during 2016.

The Department of Natural Resources will host a public celebration of the final submitted artwork and display the piece for public viewing at a Larimer County building.

For an application or details, visit www.larimer.org/openlands/artist.htm.

Applications are due by 4:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 19.