

# As Larimer County grows, farmland vanishes

Alicia Stice, [astice@coloradoan.com](mailto:astice@coloradoan.com) 10:01 a.m. MDT August 19, 2016



(Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

WELLINGTON — When Jon Slutsky moved to his Wellington dairy farm 31 years ago, there were acres of sugar beets and wheat across the road.

Now there is a 400-home subdivision.

A street light shines into his windows from the once-dark road, where the sounds of speeding cars fill the formerly isolated stretch of Larimer County Road 9.

"We went from being really isolated ... But now we have a city next to us," he said. "To be fair, it was probably an easier acclimation for us than for the people moving from Fort Collins to out here and not understanding

what living next to agriculture entails."

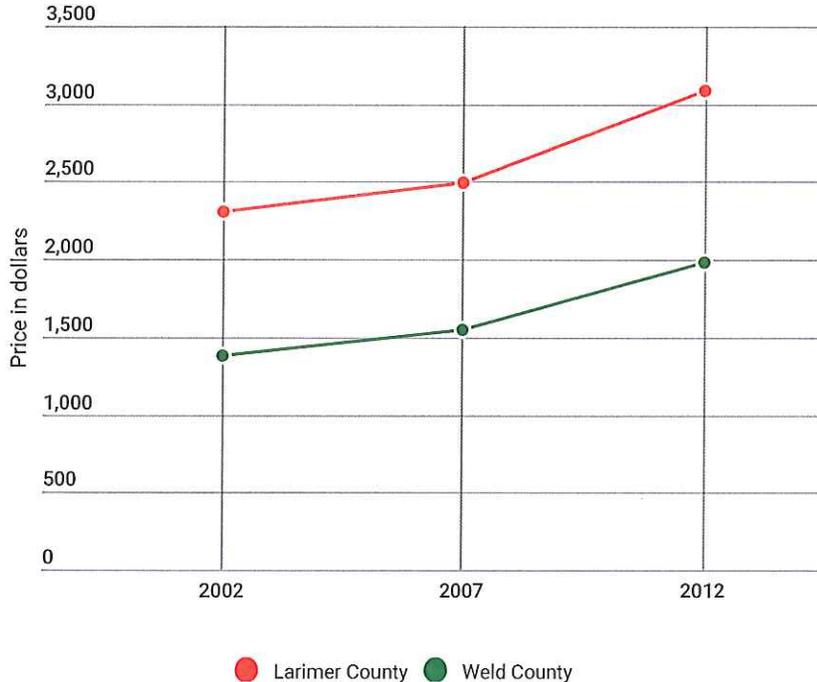
**RELATED:** [Northern Colorado's boom built on former farmland \(/story/news/2015/08/11/northern-colorados-boom-built-former-farmland/31330313/\)](#)

As Larimer County development has boomed, stories like Slutsky's have become more common.

By 2012, the most recent year for which data is available, Larimer County had lost more than 13 percent of its working farmland in the previous 10 years, a decrease of about 71,000 acres.

Much of the best farmland in the county is the most ripe for development.

## Price of 1 acre of farmland



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A map from the Natural Resource Conservation Service shows the county's prime farmland — a designation based on factors including soil makeup and incline — concentrated in an area running north and south in eastern Larimer County. The land's gentle slopes make it easier to farm, but also more inviting for builders.

"People like to build on flat land, and a lot of the prime farmland is on flat land," said Sam Adams, district conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Larimer County. "It kind of goes hand in hand."

Maps of projected residential growth in Larimer County have significant overlap with the NRCS map of prime farmland, including northwest and east-central Fort Collins and areas surrounding Loveland. These land parcels are often on the best soil, the flattest land and are easiest for developers to hook into municipal water sources, Larimer County Rural Land Planner Brenda Gimeson said.

"It's really all over the county," Gimeson said. "If you look in southern Larimer County, you see more development, less of the existing farms. Most of the areas that have been developed are on good farmland. They're easy to hook up to public water."

As the conversion of farmland continues, the county has fielded complaints from residents frustrated by their farming neighbors — the smell of manure, slow-moving farm equipment alongside the road and the sounds and farmers up in the middle of the night working.

"You can see it every day," said Gail Meisner, whose family farm has been in Wellington since the 1960s. "You drive to town, and the farms are growing houses instead of crops, especially lately. It's just crazy how fast they're popping up."

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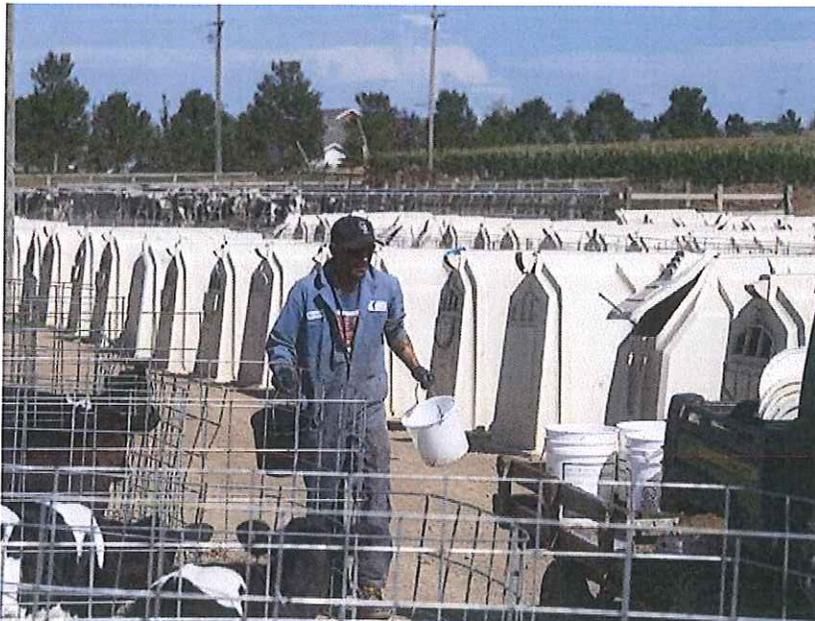
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**ROBERTS RANCH:** [200,000-plus tires dumped in Larimer County gulches \(/story/news/2016/07/18/car-tires-dumped-larimer-county-gulches/86952716/\)](http://story/news/2016/07/18/car-tires-dumped-larimer-county-gulches/86952716/)

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A worker feeds and waters calves Aug. 10 at La Luna Dairy in Wellington. The 60-acre farm and its 2,000 cows are being surrounded by housing developments in the growing northern Larimer County town. (Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

## Culture shock

When builders began constructing the Buffalo Creek subdivision across the road from Slutsky's 60-acre dairy farm about 10 years ago, he and his wife, Susan Moore, were in the process of tripling the size of their herd of cattle from 500 to 1,500.

That was enough of an adjustment before they had to factor in the displeasure of new neighbors over some of the unavoidable things that come with living next to a farm, such as smell.

"We have over 2,000 head of animals on 60 acres, and as hard as we try, we cannot hide that," Slutsky said. "I think most people that move across the street are aware of where they're moving."

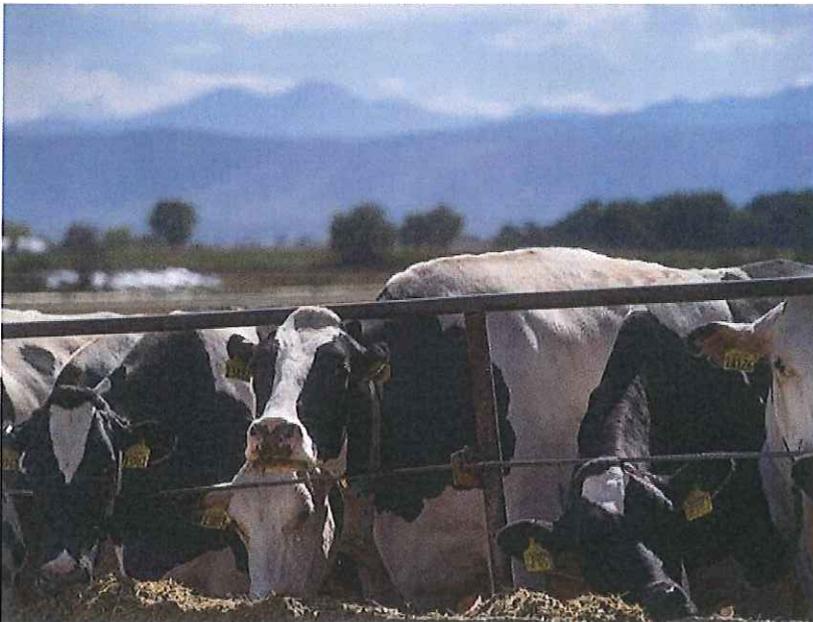
As developers snap up more agricultural land, more people used to urban living find themselves sleeping next to farms in historically rural areas, Gimeson said. As these conflicts became more apparent in the late 1990s, the county adopted its Right to Farm policy. Both Slutsky and Meisner sit on Larimer County's Agricultural Advisory Board, which helped design the policy. Among other things, it protects farmers from nuisance complaints from people who might not like the smells, sights and noise that come along with traditional farming operations.

But that does not stop people from calling in.

"A lot of people who don't have a connection to agriculture don't understand what comes with agriculture," Gimeson said. "They don't understand the smells or that people are up in the middle of the night working or using fertilizer on land that smells, running cattle. ... It's harder for farmers to move equipment around when there's more traffic. People don't understand how hard it is."

**DEVELOPMENT:** [Meet the man who's shaping Northern Colorado \(/story/money/business/2016/06/19/martin-lind-man-whos-shaping-northern-colorado/85641936/\)](#)

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Cows eat grain Aug. 10 in a lot at La Luna Dairy in Wellington. The 60-acre farm and its 2,000 cows are being surrounded by housing developments in the growing northern Larimer County town. (Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

The adjustments go both ways. Meisner said since residential development started springing up near her farm, which sits near Slutsky's, she's had all sorts of headaches. People have started placing geocaches — objects hidden for strangers to find using GPS coordinates — on and around her property. Bicyclists sometimes swerve in front of semi-trucks on the road.

"They want to live out here, but we're supposed to cater around them," she said of the new neighbors. "And they complain about everything. They're a pain in the butt."

In the same time that Larimer County has lost tens of thousands of acres of farmland, Colorado on whole has seen something of an increase. Although the state saw dramatic drops in farmland in the 1980s and '90s, it has gained farmland since 2002.

In neighboring Weld County, where communities such as Windsor have seen a boom in residential development, the loss of farmland is present, but less

pronounced than in Larimer.

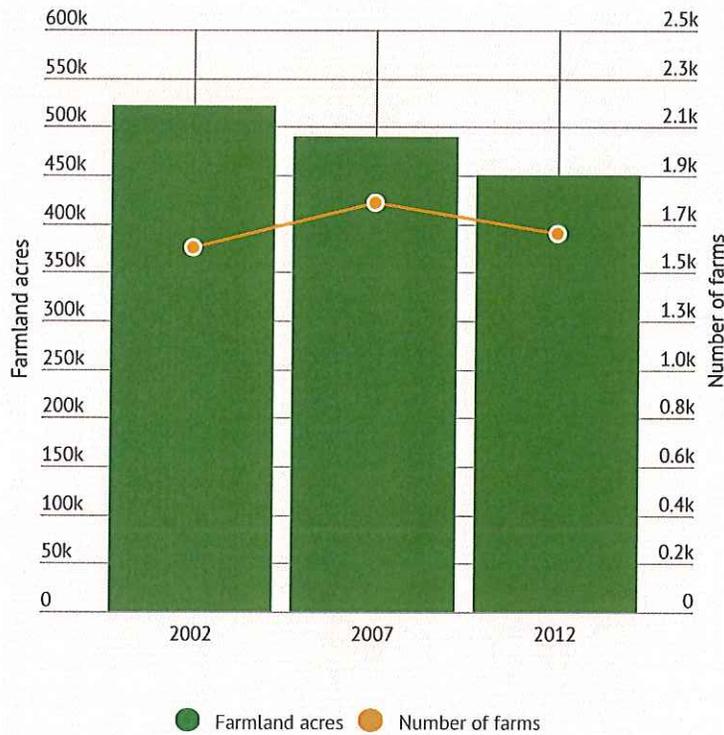
Between 2007 and 2012, Weld County lost about 6 percent of its working farmland. Weld County farmland is not worth nearly as much per acre as that in Larimer County.

Although Larimer County has lost farmland in every USDA census since 1997, Weld County's dips have been less consistent. Between 2002 and 2012, for example, the county actually saw an increase in acres of working farmland, according to the USDA.

"The Front Range right here is why people are drawn to it," Meisner said. "You get out into Weld and it's just way more agriculture out there, just because people aren't moving out there like they are out here."

**URBAN FARMING:** [CSA program means food security for low-income families \(/story/life/2016/07/27/csa-program-means-food-security-low-income-families/87630150/\)](http://story/life/2016/07/27/csa-program-means-food-security-low-income-families/87630150/)

## Larimer County farmland



Disappearing Farmland (<https://infogr.am/e5e02a44-1207-410e-9584-0f0e9f7e1ff5>)  
 Create line charts ([http://charts.infogr.am/line-chart?utm\\_source=embed\\_bottom&utm\\_medium=seo&utm\\_campaign=line\\_chart](http://charts.infogr.am/line-chart?utm_source=embed_bottom&utm_medium=seo&utm_campaign=line_chart))

## Aging farm population

Pressure to sell isn't coming solely from developers.

For many Front Range farmers, selling their land is the best option for retirement, especially when they do not have children who want to take over the operation.

The value of farmland in Larimer County tripled between 1992 and 2012, and the average age of American farmers keeps creeping up. According to the USDA census, the average age of farmers in the U.S. has risen every year since 1982, reaching 58.3 years in 2012. Meisner said she has known people whose children sell the land and any associated water rights once they inherit it.

As farmers reach retirement, many face tough decisions about what to do with their land, even if they want to see it continue on as farmland.

"The price of homes, the lots, are astronomical," Meisner said. "It gets to the point where you end up having to retire ... Do you compromise, especially if you've got health problems. 'Am I going to sell to a farmer and compromise my survival as a retired person?' That's your retirement, is the value of the farm."



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The banner features a blue sky background with white clouds. On the left, the City of Fort Collins logo is positioned above the text "Climate Action PLAN". In the center, the event location is listed as "LINCOLN CENTER Canyon West Room" with the address "417 W. Magnolia St." below it. On the right, the date "Wednesday, August 24, 2016" is displayed, followed by the schedule: "Panel discussion from 6-7 p.m." and "Open House from 7-8 p.m.". A box on the far right contains the text "RSVP required:" and the URL "fcgov.com/climateaction/rsvp".

City of Fort Collins

**Climate Action PLAN**

**LINCOLN CENTER**  
Canyon West Room  
417 W. Magnolia St.

**Wednesday, August 24, 2016**  
Panel discussion  
from 6-7 p.m.  
Open House  
from 7-8 p.m.

**RSVP required:**  
[fcgov.com/climateaction/rsvp](http://fcgov.com/climateaction/rsvp)



# Hike these trails instead of Horsetooth Rock

[Stephen Meyers](#), [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com) 10:23 a.m. MDT August 19, 2016



Looking for a beautiful hike in an unexpected location? Check out the Pawnee Buttes, located about 70 miles east of Fort Collins on Highway 14. The trail is only a four-mile round trip. Matt L. Stephens



*(Photo: Stephen Meyers/Coloradoan library)*

Believe it or not, there are other local hikes besides Horsetooth Rock.

Shocking, right? But if you've ever been to the busy open space on a weekend and had [trouble finding a parking spot](#), there are other places to go.

Lory State Park's Arthur's Rock Trail rivals the views you'll see atop Horsetooth Rock. The Poudre Canyon has Greyrock and Hewlett Gulch. Rocky Mountain National Park's iconic vistas and alpine lakes are unrivaled. Round Mountain and North Fork are up the Big Thompson Canyon. For the most solitude, head over

Cameron Pass to State Forest State Park or the Rawah Wilderness.

None of those places make this list as we're highlighting trails closer to Fort Collins, which is one of Horsetooth Rock's biggest draws. Whether you're hiking with kids or slept through the alarm, there's a trail for you.

Take a chance on one of them because Horsetooth Rock isn't going anywhere.

**YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:** [Top 5 beginner fourteeners](#)

If you want peace and quiet

## Red Mountain Open Space

Seriously, hardly anyone goes here. Last year, Larimer County counted 6,008 visitors to this open space 25 miles from Fort Collins (that's 100,000 fewer visitors than Devil's Backbone). But 45 minutes from Fort Collins, you'll find a stunning red-rock canyon and 15 miles of multi-use trails, which loop through the open space and connect to the lightly visited Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. You can even hike or bike to Wyoming's Big Hole Open Space,

hitting the Cheyenne Rim Trail via Ruby Wash or Salt Lick. Fall and spring are the best times to visit to avoid the heat, and the open space closes annually from December through March.

**Where:** About 25 miles north of Fort Collins, near the Wyoming border. From N. College Avenue, take Colorado Highway 1 (Terry Lake Road) to Larimer County Road 15 (Waverly turnoff). Go left on County Road 15 to County Road 78. Go left on County Road 78 to County Road 17. Go right on County Road 17 to County Road 80. Go left on County Road 80 to County Road 19. Go right on County Road 19 to County Road 21. Go left on County Road 21 for about seven miles to the trailhead parking area.

**Hours:** Dawn to dusk

**Pets:** Not allowed

**Information:** Larimer County Parks and Open Lands, 970-619-4570 or [www.co.larimer.co.us/parks](http://www.co.larimer.co.us/parks).

**PARKING PROBLEMS:** [Larimer County open spaces struggle with increased visitation](#)

If Horsetooth's lot is filled

### Soderberg Trailhead

You were turned away at Horsetooth, but take the drive back down the hill to Horsetooth's "lower lot" where a vast network of trails await. Few people wander off the Horsetooth Rock and Horsetooth Falls trails, so you'll find relative solitude on the Stout, Spring Creek and Wathen trails which climb through the woods into the foothills. Towers Road is renowned by trail runners and mountain bikers [for its challenging climb](#). Shoreline Trail hugs Horsetooth Reservoir and Mill Creek Trail connects to neighboring Lory State Park. Determined to hike Horsetooth Rock, you can still do so, via the combination of Swan Johnson, Towers, Herrington and Wathen trails. Pro tip: it'll be steep.

**Where:** Take Larimer County Road 38E around the south end of Horsetooth Reservoir to Shoreline Drive, which is on the west side of the reservoir. Take a right on Shoreline Drive and go 1.2 miles to the parking lot for Soderberg. The parking lot was remodeled this summer to accommodate more horse trailer parking.

**Fees:** \$6

**Pets:** Yes, on leash

**Information:** Larimer County Parks and Open Lands, 970-619-4570 or [www.co.larimer.co.us/parks](http://www.co.larimer.co.us/parks)

**TAKE A HIKE:** [Join us Aug. 27 as we venture to Chasm Lake](#)

If you're bringing the kids

### Ramsay Shockey Open Space/Pinewood Reservoir

Forgotten in favor of Horsetooth Reservoir and Carter Lake, Pinewood Reservoir west of Loveland is a small, quiet, scenic fishing hole, great for a lazy day of fishing or a family camping getaway. The reservoir adjoins 177-acre [Ramsay Shockey Open Space](#), which features the 2-mile Shoshone Trail. The loop hike is easy — mild elevation gain of 300 feet — and has several interpretive signs fun for the kids explaining the area's diverse landscape and wildlife. The campground features 27 sites, with many overlooking the reservoir.

**Where:** From Loveland, go west on U.S. 34 to Larimer County Road 29 (look for the brown Carter Lake sign) just past mile marker 85. Turn south on County Road 29 and go 2 miles. Go west on County Road 18E for 2 miles to the park entrance station where you must buy your park entrance permits (if you don't have an annual Larimer County parks pass). This is also where you buy your camping permit. Continue on County Road 18E for 4 miles to Pinewood Reservoir.

**Fees:** \$7 without valid Larimer County Parks pass

**Pets:** Yes, on leash

**Information:** Larimer County Parks and Open Lands, 970-619-4570 or [www.co.larimer.co.us/parks](http://www.co.larimer.co.us/parks).

**WATCH:** [Drone video of volunteers rebuilding the Young Gulch Trail](#)

If you slept in

### **Riverbend Ponds Natural Area**

It's 11 a.m. Saturday and you still haven't put on pants. It's OK, you can still get outside and have a productive weekend. Nestled among the eastern edge of Fort Collins, [Riverbend Ponds](#) offers a quick city escape best visited at sunset. The three miles of trails loop around the seven ponds, which are stocked with bass, crappie and catfish. Bring the fishing pole. You'll see plenty of waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as turtles, deer and foxes. From the natural area, you can hop on the Poudre Trail for a walk or run along the lazy river. Remember the pants before you leave the house.

**Where:** Parking lots off of Timberline Road, just south of Mulberry Street; along East Prospect Road past the Poudre River on the north side of the road and along Cherly Street off of Summit View Drive.

**Hours:** 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

**Fees:** Free

**Pets:** Yes, on leash

**Information:** [www.fcgov/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov/naturalareas) or 970-416-2815

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Volunteers help build new Hermit Park trail

*By Reporter-Herald Staff*

POSTED: 08/17/2016 08:11:26 PM MDT

About 50 volunteers have helped the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources start construction of a new trail at Hermit Park Open Space.

Groups from Larimer County, Overland Mountain Bike Club, Estes Park Cycling Coalition and Larimer County Horseman's Association turned out to build about 1,500 feet of trail over two days.

"The volunteers were a big help in building rock walls, pulling out tree stumps, giving insight into the multi-use trail, and bringing their passion and excitement for the new trail with them both days," Joel Schwab, trails and open lands project supervisor for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, said in a press release. "Thank you also to Overland Mountain Bike Club for helping to fuel volunteers with breakfast and snacks for the hard days' work."

The multi-use trail will be about six miles long when completed, and will connect the camping areas at the open space and include new trailheads for access.

Work on it will continue over the next two years.

The recent project was organized in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax in 2016.

For information on Help Preserve Open Spaces, visit [www.larimer.org/openspaces20th](http://www.larimer.org/openspaces20th).



## Help shape future of Horsetooth Reservoir at open house

Stephen Meyers, [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com)

4:47 p.m. MDT August 16, 2016



Larimer County will host public open houses next week to gather input on the future of its reservoir parks and The Ranch Events Complex.

Citizens will be able to offer feedback on what changes they'd like to see at Horsetooth Reservoir, Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir and Pinewood Reservoir and The Ranch. Open houses are 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Monday through

Wednesday.

Monday's open house is at Horsetooth Reservoir South Bay Group Pavilion, 4200 W. County Road 38 E, Fort Collins. Entrance fees will be waived for the meeting.

Tuesday's open house is at Larimer County Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland.

Wednesday's open house is at The Ranch Events Complex's McKee Community Building, 5280 Arena Circle, Loveland.

Larimer County is updating the master plan for its reservoir parks and developing a master plan for The Ranch. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is involved in the reservoir parks master plan update because the agency owns the reservoirs.

For information or to offer comments online, visit [www.onegreatcountytoplay.com](http://www.onegreatcountytoplay.com). Comments on the Bureau of Reclamation's federal process are due Sept. 13 and may be submitted to Pat McCusker,

natural resource specialist, at pmccusker@usbr.gov or Bureau of Reclamation, 11056 W. County Road 18 E, Loveland, CO 80537.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Public meetings set for Larimer parks, fairgrounds vision

Sessions set Aug. 22-24 in Loveland, Fort Collins

*By Pamela Johnson*

*Reporter-Herald Staff Writer*

POSTED: 08/14/2016 08:17:13 PM MDT



Larimer County officials will take public input for a new master plan to guide management at Horsetooth Reservoir, pictured here, and Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir and The Ranch fairgrounds. (*Jeff\_Stahla / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)

Residents can offer input on the future of Larimer County parks and the fairgrounds events complex at a series of upcoming meetings.

Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources and The Ranch are each creating a new master plan — an updated vision for the parks that Natural Resources manages and the first master plan for the events center complex and fairgrounds.

While they are separate departments and separate plans, the two are sharing the public input and information gathering process to reach a wider audience of people seeking different forms of entertainment throughout the county.

At three upcoming meetings, residents will be allowed to talk about what changes or new offerings they would like to see as well as give input on what already exists at The Ranch as well as Horsetooth Reservoir, Carter Lake, Flatiron Reservoir and Pinewood Reservoir.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation will be involved in the parks master plan because the agency owns the reservoirs. Larimer County contracts with the federal agency to manage recreation facilities on the reservoirs, which hold Colorado-Big Thompson Water.

The meetings are scheduled 5:30-8:30 p.m.:

- Aug. 22 (Monday) at the South Bay Group Pavilion, located at the north end of South Bay near the swim beach, Horsetooth Reservoir. Park entrance fees will be waived.

- Aug. 23 (Tuesday) at the Bison Visitors Center, 1800 S. County Road 31, west of Loveland en route to Carter Lake.
- Aug. 24 (Wednesday) at the McKee Community Building at The Ranch, 5280 Arena Circle.

More information is available and written comments may be submitted online at [www.onegreatcountytoplay.com](http://www.onegreatcountytoplay.com).

Comments for the Bureau of Reclamation's federal process are due Sept. 12 and may also be submitted to Patrick McCusker, natural resource specialist, at [pmccusker@usbr.gov](mailto:pmccusker@usbr.gov) or care of Bureau of Reclamation, 11056 W. County Road 18E, Loveland, CO 80537.



## You strong enough to swim across Horsetooth Reservoir?

[Stephen Meyers](#), [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com) 6:40 p.m. MDT August 12, 2016



Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan

(Photo: Coloradoan library)

Nearly 80 swimmers will swim the length of Horsetooth Reservoir at Sunday's [Horsetooth Open Water Swim](#), an endurance event race director Joe Bakel says is the swimming equivalent of running a marathon.

The athletes swim a 10K [from Satanka Cove to South Bay](#), with the winners expected to finish in about two hours. Like marathon runners, the swimmers must refuel every 30 to 60 minutes with carbohydrates and protein. Only, eating is a little more tricky when you're submerged in water.

Kayakers follow each swimmer in Sunday's 6.2-mile race, providing support and food for the athletes. When it's time to eat, the person in the kayak throws the swimmer a water bottle attached to a rope.

In the bottle is usually a carbohydrate-rich drink such as Perpetuem or CarboPro. Swimmers float on their backs and drink their meal.

"Feeding is definitely a different type of experience," said Bakel, an English Channel swimmer who once completed the entire Horsetooth Open Water Swim using the butterfly stroke.

In addition to distance training, athletes completing long-distance, open-water swims must also train for swimming in cold water, often for hours at a time. The Horsetooth Open Water Swim follows English Channel swim rules, which don't allow wetsuits. Last year, a few swimmers suffered from hypothermic conditions, Bakel said, as the air temperature dipped below 45 degrees at the start of the race.

Swimmers in Sunday's races should see ideal conditions, with a forecasted high of 90 degrees and the reservoir's water temperature at 73 degrees.

The 18-year event also features 2.4-mile, 1.2-mile, 1,000-yard and 250-yard swims. The event has 206 registered participants across all races.

The Horsetooth Open Water Swim benefits Team Wellness and Prevention, a local non-profit that promotes healthy lifestyles through the prevention of substance abuse.

*Xplore reporter Stephen Meyers covers the outdoors and recreation for the Coloradoan. Follow him on*



## Ready to hike? Your Fort Collins trails parking guide

[Stephen Meyers](#), [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com)

11:48 a.m. MDT August 12, 2016



*(Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)*

Headed for the hills? Fridays, weekends and holidays are the busiest days at Larimer County open spaces and Fort Collins natural areas. Follow these best practices to find a parking spot and enjoy your hike.

### Rise early

Parking lots can fill by 9:30 a.m. most weekends. Beat the rush, and get out and about early in the day.

### Or try the evenings ...

Areas slow down after 3 p.m. And who doesn't love a gorgeous night hike?

## Check the webcam

Larimer County has a webcam showing the status of the parking lot, refreshing every 5 minutes. Devil's Backbone will have one this fall. Visit [www.larimer.org/naturalresources/htmp-webcam.cfm](http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources/htmp-webcam.cfm).

## Check social media

Larimer County and Fort Collins Natural Areas both post regularly on Facebook and Twitter, providing updates on parking capacity and trail closures.

- Larimer County Natural Resources Facebook: [www.facebook.com/LCNaturalResources](http://www.facebook.com/LCNaturalResources)
- Larimer County Natural Resources Twitter: [twitter.com/LCDNR](https://twitter.com/LCDNR)



[Larimer County DNR @LCDNR](https://twitter.com/LCDNR)

South Bay day use area at Horsetooth Reservoir is at capacity. Sunrise and Rotary park on CR23 has available parking. Thank you.

- Fort Collins Natural Areas Facebook: [www.facebook.com/FCNaturalAreas](http://www.facebook.com/FCNaturalAreas)
- Fort Collins Natural Areas Twitter: [twitter.com/FCNaturalAreas](https://twitter.com/FCNaturalAreas)



Meteor watchers: Nat areas are open 5 am- 11 pm except Bobcat Ridge, Soapstone, Gateway & Res Ridge are dawn-dusk.

## Go somewhere else

Shut out at Horsetooth? Carter Lake's Sundance Trail is another option. Lory State Park neighbors Horsetooth and features Arthur's Rock and access to Horsetooth Reservoir. Red Mountain and Eagle's Nest open spaces north of Fort

Collins are rarely visited.

## Up for a drive?

Rocky Mountain National park also often fills up early on the weekends, but if you're headed that direction, keep an eye on their Tweets: <https://twitter.com/RockyNPS>



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Until congestion is relieved: Restricted Vehicle Access in Wild Basin beyond entrance station

# Beautiful hike, horrific parking: Larimer County struggles with increased visitation

[Stephen Meyers](#), [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com) 2:14 p.m. MDT August 12, 2016



Northern Colorado trails, including Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, experience packed parking lots and busy trails during weekends. Here are some tips to avoid the crowds. Stephen Meyers/The Coloradoan

*(Photo: Elliott Foust/For the Coloradoan)*

Who knew the toughest part of enjoying area hikes wouldn't be the elevation gain but finding a parking spot?

From Horsetooth Mountain Open Space to Rocky Mountain National Park, parking is as much a problem at area public land as in Old Town on a Friday night.

Some visitors have even resorted to using Uber to avoid the parking problem.

"People are moving here so they can play outside," said Travis Rollins, operations manager at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. "We've seen this tremendous population boom in the last five to eight years and people are still coming. This is an issue that isn't going away."

Visitation at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space has surged 20 percent in five years — the area saw more than 125,000 visitors in 2015 — leading to an overflowing parking lot on weekends, causing frustration at a place where people come to relax and Larimer County rangers worry about overcrowding diminishing the visitor experience and heavy foot traffic widening and damaging trails.

But the parking lot experience is hardly isolated to Horsetooth Rock. Bobcat Ridge Natural Area, 3 miles west of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, saw an estimated 75,000 visitors in 2015, a bump of more than 30,000 visitors in two years.

Plan to visit Coyote Ridge Natural Area, south of Fort Collins, after work or Devil's Backbone Natural Area, west of Loveland, on a Saturday morning? Ah, good luck.

Visitor capacity issues at Rocky Mountain National Park are well-documented, as visitation jumped 21 percent last year to a record 4.1 million. Another record is likely on the horizon; visitation is up 16 percent this year.

Every year, land managers from across the state gather at the Colorado Open Space Alliance to brainstorm the state's most pressing land issues. Their solution: "It's impossible to keep up with the demand."

## Horsetooth Rock's mass appeal

It's a familiar story: Minnesotans Rob and Kendra Benson, attracted by the region's proximity to outdoor recreation, fell in love with Fort Collins and moved here. The graphic designer and web developer couple bought a house in 2012 across the street from Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, where they live and play in the foothills with their three children.

"It's funny, I always thought Boulder was going to be the place. After spending a few days there I was like, 'these are not my people,'" Rob Benson said. "A friend suggested Fort Collins, and like everyone else, we loved it."

That happens to a lot of people.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from July 2014 to July 2015, Larimer County grew by 2.7 percent, as 8,920 people moved to the area, boosting the county's population to 333,577.

### **HISTORY:** [The legend of Fort Collins' Horsetooth Rock](#)

The state demographer projects by 2040 Larimer County will add about 145,000 residents — roughly the population of another Fort Collins.

That population growth has fueled the packed parking lots visitors see weekends at Horsetooth, Blue Sky, Devil's Backbone, Coyote Ridge and Bobcat Ridge.

Living in the foothills neighborhood, the Benson family has a front-row seat to the weekend mad dash. When the parking lot fills — often by 9:30 a.m. — drivers are directed by a parking attendant to either Bobcat Ridge or back down Larimer County 38E to the Soderberg lot (referred to as the lower lot) or the Blue Sky lot and encouraged to hike those trails.

But the majority of hikers come to Horsetooth to hike "The Rock" and nothing else. It's common to see groups of hikers walking up the steep, narrow county road to the Horsetooth trailhead, much to the dismay of Larimer County officials.

### **GET OUT:** [Experience Horsetooth for the sunrise](#)

"We certainly do not recommend that, but wind or rain or 100 degree temperatures, they're at least going to give it a try," Rollins said. "The fact is, for the majority of people, Horsetooth Rock is the goal. They don't want to drive 45 minutes to Red Mountain."

Everyone has a Horsetooth Rock story, said Benson, whose Instagram profile, Horsetooth'd, shows the popularity of Fort Collins' iconic rock. The profile, launched this spring, posts photos of the rock and reservoir and shares other user's images that use the 'horsetooth'd' hashtag, which has more than 5,000 posts since the account launched this spring.

A graphic designer, Benson also created a design of Horsetooth Rock, with the image slapped on memorabilia such as stickers and T-shirts.

"We were in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and they had all these stickers and stuff and we realized Fort Collins doesn't really have anything like that. You're on vacation and get a sticker to remember your visit," Benson said. "We have Horsetooth, this beautiful place, you can be there in just a couple of minutes, it's well known. Everyone has a special memory at Horsetooth."

And a parking story.

### **Parking solutions slim**

Memories of Horsetooth and other regional open spaces are increasingly of frustration not freedom.

Devil's Backbone, a popular mountain-biking destination west of Loveland, became so congested with hikers, mountain bikers, trail runners and equestrians vying for precious trail space that the county built a new trail to separate the types of users this spring.

Larimer County also reconfigured and expanded the parking lot, adding about 40 spots to give the lot room for 98 vehicles. Before the reconfiguration, about 60 vehicles parked in the lot and another 30 to 40 would squeeze along Hidden Valley Road leading into the open space.

Chris Fleming, operations manager at Devil's Backbone, said the new configurations are working, but added the summer is a down time at the open space that offers little shade and still sees more than 100,000 visitors a year.

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"The city does not build parking lots to handle the equivalent of Black Friday ... While new parking and more parking are key strategies, it is not likely the city will ever have enough parking spaces for everybody on that magical May day when the weather is perfect."

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### **John Stokes, director of Fort Collins Natural Areas**

"We'll see how the space handles capacity this fall," said Fleming, who recommends visitors carpool, or park the car at K-Mart in Loveland and ride their bikes 2 1/2 miles to the open space.

Fleming said lack of parking has become so bad that some trail users have even used Uber to catch rides to and from the trailhead.

Boulder County, facing the same parking woes, in 2012 launched a free summer and fall weekend shuttle service to Hessie Trailhead for visitors to the popular Indian Peaks Wilderness.

The shuttle carries passengers from Nederland's Regional Transportation District Park-n-Ride lot to the trailhead off of Fourth of July Road.

Boulder County Transportation Department spokesman Andrew Barth said the county pays about \$100,000 a year to provide the shuttle service, covering the cost of drivers, shuttle vehicles, ranger enforcement, port-a-potties and miscellaneous expenses.

### **MUST DO: [Visit Rocky Mountain National Park after dark](#)**

The shuttles have carried 60 to more than 600 users in a single weekend.

Rocky Mountain National Park has tried to alleviate its parking woes with a shuttle system to Bear Lake.

Zoe Shark, spokesperson for Fort Collins Natural Areas, and Fleming said a conceptual shuttle idea has been tossed around for Larimer County, but it's only a floating idea at this point.

"Really, it comes down to cost. Who pays for the shuttle? Where are the pickups? It becomes overwhelming pretty quickly," Fleming said. "And really, although we could make these trails like a freeway, tripling the amount of people visiting, that isn't really part of our master plan or goal."

Larimer County Parks and Open Lands owns and manages 44,000 acres of open space, including large swaths of land such as Red Mountain Open Space north of Fort Collins near the Wyoming border.

In June, Larimer County received a \$4 million grant from Great Outdoors Colorado to conserve nearly 2,300 acres in the foothills near Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Four separate properties will be conserved, and new hiking trails have been proposed — a potential boon for hikers and mountain bikers looking for new, and less crowded, places to recreate.

John Stokes, director of Fort Collins Natural Areas, said purchasing more land is the best way to alleviate overcrowding and parking concerns at its natural areas. The city recently purchased four new natural areas, with two expected to open to the public in the next year.

Of the 40 natural areas open to the public, four — Coyote Ridge, Bobcat Ridge, Maxwell and Gateway — experience packed parking lots during the weekend. Like most public lands, the bulk of the visitation takes place at a few locations.

“The city does not build parking lots to handle the equivalent of Black Friday,” Stokes said, referring to one of the busiest shopping days of the year. “While new parking and more parking are key strategies, it is not likely the city will ever have enough parking spaces for everybody on that magical May day when the weather is perfect.”

Larimer County this summer reconfigured its Soderberg lot at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space to accommodate more horse trail parking. Two summers ago, it added 26 parking spaces to the Blue Sky lot, giving the popular mountain biking trailhead 51 spaces.

Horsetooth Mountain’s upper lot, the trailhead to Horsetooth Rock, includes 92 parking spaces. Rollins said there are no plans — and no space — to expand the parking lot. Though Larimer County purchased new land, the area just west and adjacent to the open space remains private property.

Similar to Fleming’s position on the shuttles, Rollins doesn’t believe paving a new parking lot is the best solution.

“How many people are we going to squeeze on the mountain?” Rollins said. “We have to think of the visitor experience.”

But what is “busy” depends on who you ask.

A recent natural areas visitors survey showed 41 percent of survey respondents think natural areas are slightly crowded, 17 percent say they are moderately crowded and 3 percent say they are very crowded.

Mercedes Davila and boyfriend Todd Stoltz traveled from Greeley to hike Horsetooth Rock, a deviation from their usual weekends spent lounging on the family boat at Horsetooth Reservoir. Twice, Davila said, she’s driven to the trailhead only to be turned around because it was full. They snagged a parking spot last weekend during a lull in visitation in the late afternoon.

“I don’t think today is that bad,” Davila said from atop Horsetooth Rock where she was joined by about 20 other people.

Stoltz, who hiked to the top of the rock for the first time, said it’s no wonder the parking lot is usually full on weekends.

“We were surprised we were able to get in during the weekend,” Stoltz said. “I can see why it’s so popular. It’s pretty beautiful up here. I didn’t think you’d be able to see so much.”

The pair enjoyed the views on the hike down, posing for selfies and stopping to look at two deer bounding through the forest. The golden light shimmered across the brown hillside, as Davila, Stolz and a string of other Horsetooth hikers downed their last remaining sips of water and walked toward an unfamiliar sight: a nearly empty parking lot.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Rangers warn of heat sickness, urge people to take water on the trail

Loveland has hit 90 on 40 days

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 08/10/2016 02:53:06 PM MDT



Lindsay Persons, in town on business from Atlanta, Ga., took the afternoon off to enjoy some time on the trails at Devil's Backbone Open Space Tuesday afternoon August 9, 2016 in Loveland. To keep hydrated Persons took water with her on the trail but ran out before her hike was over. (Michael Brian / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

With hot temperatures throughout the summer, Larimer County rangers have had to help seven people and four dogs suffering from heat exhaustion on area trails.

"We see that very frequently, people go out unprepared," said Brian Vick, a ranger who works for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

He urged hikers to carry extra water, to drink frequently even if they do not feel thirsty and to make sure to provide water for their dogs and horses as well.

"Water, water and more water," said Vick.

"You don't wait until you're thirsty. That can start to lead you down the wrong path, no pun intended."

Since June 1, temperatures in Loveland have hit 90 degrees or above on 40 different days, including a high of 93 on Tuesday, and the forecast calls for a high of 91 on Wednesday, according to information from the Colorado Climate Center and the National Weather Service.

A weather station in Loveland recorded 14 days at 90 or higher in June, 22 in July and four so far in August, totaling 40 days, according to Noah Newman, from the Colorado Climate Center. Only one of those days, in June, reached triple digits. The highs in Fort Collins have reached 90 or above on 27 days, according to Newman.

Temperatures fluctuate throughout the region and may be cooler on trails at higher elevations.

But still, with summer days, rangers every year are called to assist people who are suffering from heat-related conditions because, once on the trail, water sources are scarce or not at all, according to information from Larimer County.

Vick mentioned the Devil's Backbone and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space as examples because both are very popular, have areas with very little shade, and the only water supplies are at the trailhead.

Ways to prevent heat exhaustion include carrying and drinking plenty of water, wearing a hat, lightweight loose clothing and sunscreen and being careful not to overexert oneself. If a person does feel faint or weak, he or she should stop hiking and move to a cool area.

And, Vick said, do not hesitate to reach out to a ranger for help. All county park rangers carry extra water and have medical training, he noted.

The ranger also reminded hikers to make sure to provide water to their dogs as well, because the pooches "are constantly wearing their fur coats, their winter coats" and to never leave their dogs in locked cars at the trailhead.

Vick said he does see dogs locked inside vehicles every summer, and people need to realize how quickly the inside of a vehicle heats up to way above the outside temperature and how dangerous it can be.

## REPORTER-HERALD

# Greenback cutthroat trout now back in native waters

Larimer County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife coordinate trout release

By *Pamela Johnson*

*Reporter-Herald Staff Writer*

POSTED: 08/10/2016 08:55:24 PM MDT



Boyd Wright, biologist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, releases greenback cutthroat trout into Sand Creek on Larimer County's Red Mountain Open Space. The release is part of an effort to return the native fish to this area and to study how they survive in a unique stream environment. (*Special to the Reporter-Herald*)

A species of fish that were once near extinction until biologists discovered one pure colony have been introduced into a small, protected stream on Red Mountain Open Space.

Specialists with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources and Colorado Parks and

Wildlife carried 269 greenback cutthroat trout in backpacks — protected in small plastic bags filled with water — about 2.5 miles to a section of Sand Creek.

There, they placed the fish in the waters and let them swim free — an effort to reintroduce Colorado's state fish into its native region, the Platte River Basin, and to study whether they will thrive in a unique stream versus non-native brook trout.

"It's a neat project," said Ken Kehmeier, senior aquatic biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "It's neat to see these sorts of things come to a point where we're putting the native species back into the native habitat."

Once abundant in streams and rivers in Colorado, the greenback cutthroats were squeezed out by other trout species that settlers and miners introduced to streams. Stocking different types of fish into Colorado waters dates back to the 1800s; in fact, the federal fish hatchery in Leadville opened in 1872.

"They were the only trout native to the Platte River Basin," said Kehmeier. "Brooks, browns, rainbows, mackinaws and anything else trout-wise weren't natural. White man brought them."

Non-native trout species flourished in Colorado and basically pushed out the greenback cutthroat trout, which was presumed extinct in 1937.

"They're sort of whipped when it comes to competing with other species of trout," said Kehmeier. "They can't compete with brooks and browns, and they hybridize with rainbows."

The greenbacks made their way onto the endangered species list until, several decades ago, researchers discovered what they thought were a population of this species. Efforts to revive and reintroduce the species led to the fish being downgraded to a threatened species by 1978.



Natural resources specialists recently carried small bags of greenback cutthroat trout 2.5 miles into Red Mountain Open Space to release them into Sand Creek as part of an effort to return to the native fish to the area. (*Special to the Reporter-Herald*)

But genetics, which have improved in the past 15 years, proved experts wrong. These fish were not genetically pure greenback cutthroat trout.

A colony of fish in Bear Creek near Colorado Springs, however, was discovered within the past five years and is believed to be the only one left in the state.

Genetic testing by researchers from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, University of Colorado and Colorado State University compared these fish to samples that were collected in the 1860s and preserved at the Smithsonian Institution and Harvard Museum and proved that they were in fact, pure greenback cutthroat trout, Kehmeier explained.

Fish biologists have since been conserving and growing the population of this fish to put them back into their native habitat.

Populations have been introduced into Zimmerman Lake on top of Cameron Pass and Rock Creek in South Park and now into Sand Creek on Larimer County's Red Mountain Open Space. This fall, more will go into Sand Creek, a small 3-mile stretch that is sustained by spring inputs and rainfall, as well as into Herman Gulch in Clear Creek.

Larimer County had hoped to reintroduce the greenback cutthroat trout into Sand Creek and included that as a goal in its plan for the open space.

And recently, the timing was right because there were extra fish available at the Colorado Parks and Wildlife hatchery near Salida.

So, together, the county and state agencies put fish into the middle third of Sand Creek.

But first, they delivered an electrical shock to the one-mile middle section of the stream and removed all the nonnative brook trout to create a setting in which to study the fish. (The 875 trout they removed were donated to the Rocky Mountain Raptor Center for lunches and dinners.)

The first release, on July 21, involved putting yearlings that were about 5 inches long into one section of the water.

The second release, in September, will put fish into a section of the river in which brook trout still exist as well as the stretch that was recently stocked. These 1,000 fish will be 1-month old.

Then, biologists will study the population for years to come and see how the greenback cutthroat trout survive. And in about three years, time will reveal whether the fish not only survive but also are able to reproduce and thrive.

"I can't tell you how rewarding it is for us and what a nice step forward for conservation of the species," said Meegan Flenniken, resource program manager for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

"The fish in general are a natural part of that ecological makeup of the river."



# Larimer County acquires farm with water rights southwest of Berthoud

BY [NFN](#) ON AUGUST 9, 2016 IN [DISPATCHES](#) · [ADD COMMENT](#)

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources purchased a 211-acre farm southwest of Berthoud, along with its valuable water rights. The deal closed Monday, August 8.

Using Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax dollars, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources purchased the property, known previously as the Malchow Farm, to conserve its agricultural, historic, scenic, community buffer and educational values. General public access is not permitted at this time. Larimer County plans to continue leasing the property as an active agricultural farming operation.

The Town of Berthoud provided \$100,000 to Larimer County to help purchase the farm, which will also help leverage a potential Great Outdoors Colorado funding request being submitted later this month.

“We’re excited to acquire this farm and its myriad conservation values,” said Gary Buffington, director of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. “The property helps us further our mission to conserve working lands and foster an appreciation for our agricultural heritage in Larimer County.”

This property is located one mile southwest of Berthoud, just north of the Little Thompson River and adjacent to U.S. 287 on the highway’s west side. It consists of high-quality agricultural soils, with approximately 188 irrigated, 18 pasture and 5 farmstead acres. Located just north of the Larimer-Boulder county line, the property serves as a gateway to Larimer County and a doorstep to the town of Berthoud, with sweeping views of Longs Peak and the Front Range. The property contains several historic features, including a pioneer gravesite, beet shack and a big red barn that can be seen for miles. The Overland Trail once crossed the property.

The property, infrastructure and minerals were purchased along with the valuable water rights, including 240 units of Colorado-Big Thompson, or C-BT, water, 16 shares of Handy Ditch native water rights and 20 shares in Dry Creek Lateral Ditch.

Larimer County is actively seeking partners to engage in a water sharing agreement on this property that will provide partnership funds toward the purchase of the water, keep the farm in active production and allow water partners to share some of the water in drought years. This water sharing agreement, known as an Alternative Transfer Mechanism, or ATM, is a cooperative solution encouraged by the Colorado Water Plan to share water across uses without permanently drying up high-quality working farms, such as this farm near Berthoud.

Larimer County has developed a stewardship plan for the property and will develop a full management plan with public input within the next several years. The property was purchased from the Malchow family, but an official name for the property, now that it’s a Larimer County open space, will be chosen at a later date. Public tours of the property are planned for later this year.

For additional information, contact Kerri Rollins, Open Lands Program manager, at 970-619-4577.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Larimer pays \$8.4 million for farm, water rights

Berthoud farm with stay in production, water to be shared

*By Pamela Johnson*

*Reporter-Herald Staff Writer*

POSTED: 08/09/2016 02:23:24 PM MDT



Rich farmland, history and views are among the reasons Larimer County purchased a 211-acre farm southwest of Berthoud. The sale to the Department of Natural Resources closed Monday. (*Charlie Johnson / Larimer County Department of Natural Resources*)

Larimer County now officially owns the 211-acre Malchow farm south of Berthoud and its associated water rights — a unique agreement that includes a water sharing component.

The \$8.4 million sale from the Malchow family to the Department of Natural Resources closed Monday.

The county bought the property to conserve its agricultural, historic and scenic values and plans to continue leasing the fields as an active farm.

One unique aspect of the sale was that the county also bought the water rights, including 240 units of Colorado-Big Thompson water, with the intention of entering into a water sharing agreement.

Under such an agreement, the farm may vary its crops over several years, so in drought years, some of the irrigation water can be sold.

This allows the farm to stay in production for the long-term and is an arrangement encouraged by the Colorado Water Plan.

The farm is located along U.S. 287 one mile southwest of Berthoud, and along with rich farmland, it includes historic buildings and a pioneer grave site believed to be tied to the Overland Trail, which once crossed the property.

"We're excited to acquire this farm and its myriad of conservation values," Gary Buffington, director of the natural resources department, said, according to a news release.

"The property helps us further our mission to conserve working lands and foster appreciation for our agricultural heritage in Larimer County."

The farm will not immediately be open for public access. However, a management plan that will be developed within the next few years could include an educational component in which the farm may be used to teach the public about agriculture.

The town of Berthoud pitched in \$100,000 toward the purchase of the property, and Larimer County will be applying for a Great Outdoors Colorado grant to help with the cost.

## REPORTER-HERALD

# Man arrested after stabbing at Horsetooth Reservoir

*By Reporter-Herald Staff*

POSTED: 08/03/2016 10:34:10 PM MDT

FORT COLLINS — The Larimer County Sheriff's Office arrested a 22-year-old Fort Collins man Wednesday on allegations of second-degree assault, a Class 4 felony after a woman was stabbed in the arm at the Sunrise Picnic Area of Horsetooth Reservoir.

Deputies got a report about the stabbing just after 2:30 p.m. and when they arrived learned the suspect, Patrick Benjamin Stokley, had fled on foot heading north on a trail, according to a press release from LCSO public information officer David Moore.

Traffic on County Road 23 was blocked so deputies could set up a perimeter and search for the man.

He was located on the trail and refused to obey commands to drop the knife, so SWAT and negotiator personnel were called in, and negotiators were able to convince him to put down the knife, according to Moore.

The man was taken into custody just before 5 p.m. and taken to the Larimer County jail.

The victim was treated at the scene for a superficial injury to her arm.



# Paramedics join boat rangers at Horsetooth

KATI BLOCKER UCHEALTH 10:45 a.m. MDT July 27, 2016



Poudre Valley Hospital EMS paramedic Braden Applegate, right, joins county boat ranger Darren Brand on Horsetooth Reservoir on a recent Saturday as part of partnership between the two entities and Poudre Fire Authority to provide the quickest medical care possible during the summer weekends. Photo by Kelly Tracer, UCHealth. *(Photo: Provided by UCHealth)*

## New partnership cuts response times

Northern Colorado's first responders have teamed up this summer at one of the state's busiest reservoirs to provide the quickest medical care possible.

Through Labor Day, a paramedic from UCHealth's Poudre Valley Hospital EMS team will join Larimer County boat rangers on Saturdays and holidays. On Sundays, a volunteer emergency medical technician from Poudre Fire Authority will accompany rangers.

"This partnership is important so we can provide, if needed, advanced life support when minutes can change lives," said Jim Hawkins, senior ranger and boat safety coordinator with Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

Having a medical professional on the boat could cut response times by 20 to 27 minutes —the time it normally takes, in optimal conditions, for an ambulance to arrive from its stations in Fort Collins to the boat ramps at the south and north ends of Horsetooth Reservoir.

"Getting there 20 minutes earlier really can be the difference between life and death," said Kelly McCleary, one of two PVH EMS paramedics certified to ride with the rangers.

Paramedics are emergency medical care providers who have built on their EMT education to learn more skills in administering medications, providing advanced airway support, and resuscitating and supporting patients with significant problems such as heart attacks or trauma.

McCleary, along with Braden Applegate, PVH EMS chief, board the boat with almost all the same medical equipment that's in an ambulance. This includes a cardiac monitor and defibrillator, advanced airway equipment and cardiac resuscitation medication.

To prepare for the busy summer season, PVH EMS paramedics and the PFA EMTs trained together for more than 40 hours in May. Along with responding to injuries that occur in and on the water, the crew may be the first to respond to hiking accidents, snake bites, bicycle accidents or even motor vehicle accidents that occur in areas surrounding the reservoir.

"The boat training was quite intense," McCleary said. "The boat rangers have such a dynamic crew up there with so much experience. I really love the partnerships that we've developed, and I really think it'll make a difference in improving outcomes and saving lives."

UCHealth is absorbing the cost of providing the paramedic, while the EMT from PFA is a volunteer. The staffing of medical personnel on ranger boats runs from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Wildflower Walk offered at Hermit Park

*By Reporter-Herald Staff*

POSTED: 07/27/2016 06:46:01 PM MDT

Larimer County will host a Wildflower and Forest Ecology Walk at 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 6, at Hermit Park Open Space, 17 Hermit Park Road, south of Estes Park.

Ecologist Dr. Paul Alaback will discuss ways in which flowers, shrubs, trees and wildlife form intricate relationships with one another.

The program is part of the 20th Anniversary Program Series. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax.

Participants should meet under the group pavilion near the Kruger Rock trailhead, and bring water, a sack lunch, sunscreen and appropriate clothing.

The program is free, but participants must purchase a \$6 day permit to park at Hermit Park, or have an annual pass for Larimer County's parks and open spaces.

Registration is required at [www.larimer.org/NRregistration](http://www.larimer.org/NRregistration).

For details, contact Dan Marotti at 619-4565 or [dmarotti@larimer.org](mailto:dmarotti@larimer.org).

# THE DENVER POST

## Wildlife officials stock Larimer County creek with rare greenback cutthroat trout

The greenbacks have been placed in Sand Creek in the Red Mountain Open Space



RJ Sangosti, Denver Post file

Greenback cutthroat trout swim at the the Leadville hatchery in this 2012 file photos. The hatchery, which dates to the 1880s, is being used to restock the state fish in a Larimer County creek.

By **JESSE PAUL** | [jpaul@denverpost.com](mailto:jpaul@denverpost.com)

PUBLISHED: July 26, 2016 at 2:37 pm |

UPDATED: July 26, 2016 at 9:54 pm

A creek in Larimer County has been stocked with rare [greenback cutthroat trout](#) as part of an experiment by state wildlife officials who are working to ensure the fish's survival.

The trout were placed in Sand Creek — which is sustained by spring inputs and rainfall alone as opposed to snowmelt — in the county's Red Mountain Open Space just south of the Wyoming border.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife are hoping that they can [learn more about the trout's](#) survival from the unusual stream.

The greenbacks are [listed as a "threatened" species](#) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The creek is currently inhabited by a low-density brook trout population, with 2015 population estimates suggesting densities of brook trout range from 30 to 110 adult fish per mile, much lower than typical brook trout streams," Boyd Wright, a native aquatic species biologist for CPW, said in a statement. "Usually nonnative brook trout quickly outcompete and displace native cutthroat trout, but given the low densities in Sand Creek, we are employing an experimental approach to see if this may be a unique scenario where cutthroat might actually have a competitive advantage over brook trout."

About 270 yearling greenbacks were stocked in the stream and later this year an additional 1,000 will be added.

CPW says analysis of the creek indicates the greenbacks should do well.

Greenbacks were thought to be extinct by 1937 but were discovered in the watersheds of the South Platte and Arkansas basins in the late 1950s, according to CPW. Wildlife officials [have been working since to reintroduce them](#) because the greenback cutthroat trout are Colorado's state fish.



# Greenback cutthroat released in Larimer County

Stephen Meyers, [stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com](mailto:stephenmeyers@coloradoan.com)

5:01 p.m. MDT July 26, 2016



## Top of Form

Genetically pure greenback cutthroat trout were recently reintroduced to Sand Creek at Red Mountain Open Space north of Fort Collins. Watch the fish swim prior to being stocked in this video shared by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Courtesy of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. *(Photo: Courtesy of Charlie Johnson/Larimer County)*

Colorado's state fish has a new home in Northern Colorado.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife recently stocked greenback cutthroat trout into

Sand Creek at [Red Mountain Open Space](#), 30 miles north of Fort Collins, culminating in a nearly decade-long project by Larimer County to reintroduce the threatened species to Red Mountain. [Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) and Larimer County will monitor the greenback's progress over the next several years.

Placed on the Endangered Species List in 1973, these small fish, marked by dark brown spots and brilliant red coloring near the throat, have benefited from massive recovery and restocking efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Trout Unlimited. Recently, genetically pure greenback cutthroats have been released around the state, including Zimmerman Lake near Cameron Pass.

This experimental stocking effort at Red Mountain will be used to evaluate how greenbacks perform in a unique stream environment such as Sand Creek. Unlike most trout streams in Colorado that are sustained by snowmelt runoff, flows in Sand Creek are sustained by spring inputs and rainfall, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The section of Sand Creek where the fish were stocked is closed to the public and fishing is not allowed at Red Mountain.

Boyd Wright, native aquatic species biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, said Sand Creek has a low-density population of brook trout, potentially good news for the greenback as they compete for survival in the 3-mile trout habitat of the creek.

"Usually non-native brook trout quickly out-compete and displace native cutthroat trout, but given the low densities in Sand Creek, we are employing an experimental approach to see if this may be a unique scenario where cutthroat might actually have a competitive advantage over brook trout," Wright said in a [CPW press release](#).

Prior to stocking, 875 non-native trout were removed by electrofishing and donated to the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program. CPW stocked a section of the creek with 269 1-year-old greenbacks, with another 1,000 planned later this year. The 269 greenbacks will be able to reproduce by 2018, and by 2019, biologists should have sufficient data on the cutthroat's population and adaptation to the creek.

# REPORTER-HERALD

## Loveland seeks input on Sunset Vista trail, natural area

Long View Regional Trail to connect Loveland-Fort Collins through site

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

POSTED: 07/25/2016 08:30:58 PM MDT



Cattails, trees and grasses frame the historic farmstead Monday at Sunset Vista, Loveland's newest open space on the northeast corner of 57th Street and Taft Avenue. (*Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald*)

Two potential trail routes are being considered to wind through Sunset Vista Natural Area in addition to the portion of the Long View Regional Trail that will connect Loveland to Fort Collins — one that stretches through farming areas and offers broader views or a second tucked into the more protected wetlands and grasslands that are home to wildlife species.

Loveland officials want to hear from residents on these two options as well as other aspects of the property, which is located on the northeast corner of 57th Street and Taft Avenue.

"You don't realize it when you're driving by that it has so much diversity," said Debbie Eley, open land specialist for the city of Loveland.

But those who stop and walk mere feet onto the property can feel enveloped by silence and nature, experience farming as well as native prairies and may spot birds and other wildlife including fox, deer and amphibians.

Residents have not been able to experience the property yet because it has been closed to the public since the city purchased the land in 2014 with the intent to develop and open the site in the future. That time is coming as officials are working on the plan and expect it to be open by spring 2018.

The site also is rich with wetlands, an active farm and a historic farmstead. The current plan is to maintain a leased farm on the property as well as to enhance wetlands and return other prairie lands to native grasses.

The current plan for the property includes a trailhead with parking on West 57th Street and a less than one mile stretch of the 4.4-mile Long View Trail that will connect Loveland and Fort Collins parallel to Taft Avenue.

This paved trail is a cooperative effort by Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County, has received \$2 million in grants and will connect to the existing Loveland recreation trail where it ends on the southwest side of the intersection of Taft and 57th. That project includes a bridge over the Loudon Ditch and intersection improvements.

A second soft-surface trail around Sunset Vista Natural Area also is planned, and city officials are looking at two possible options.

Option A would start at the parking lot and stretch along the east side of the property at a high enough elevation to offer views of the foothills and mountains to the west, continue through the winter wheat farming area and tie back into the Long View Regional Trail at the north end of the property. This 0.72-mile trail would cover a small section of wetlands and native grasslands but also highlight farming and the surrounding view.

Option B would start at the same spot at the edge of the parking lot, but would be tucked in on the south end of the property, winding 0.65 miles along wetlands and through native grasslands before tying into the paved trail on the south end of the property. The natural grass and wetlands, which attract the birds and critters, would envelop the entire trail, which would be on a lower, more protected portion of the property.

At the east edge of the parking lot, city planners are looking at a future connection to the Loveland recreational trail to the east, possibly along 57th Street or even with an underpass beneath railroad tracks. This, however, is further in the future because the city has not yet acquired all the property connections or funding; it is in the "we're working on it" stage.

The plans for Sunset Vista, however, will come to fruition in the next two years. The city hopes to finish initial development and trails and open the property to the public alongside construction of the regional trail, which should be complete by spring 2018.

For more information, visit [www.CityofLoveland.org/OpenLands](http://www.CityofLoveland.org/OpenLands) and click on the link for Sunset Vista Natural Area. Comments, which are due Aug. 8, may be submitted to [OpenLands@CityofLoveland.org](mailto:OpenLands@CityofLoveland.org).