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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Plan**

Long View Farm was acquired in order to preserve a one mile open corridor buffer between the City of Fort Collins and the City of Loveland along the western side of U.S. Highway 287 (U.S. 287). The objectives of the acquisition included: a) preserving a Fort Collins/Loveland separator corridor along U.S. 287, b) protecting the scenic vista of the Front Range mountain backdrop, and c) retaining the rural agricultural use of the land that currently characterizes the corridor between Fort Collins and Loveland. Long View Farm consists of three properties: 1) Ute Farm, 428.25 acres acquired in April, 1997; 2) the One Putt property, 50.25 acres acquired in April, 1997; and 3) the Buckner property, 120 acres acquired in March, 1998. The Ute Farm and One Putt properties were acquired in partnership by Larimer County, the City of Fort Collins, the City of Loveland, and Great Outdoors Colorado. The Buckner property was acquired by Larimer County. While protection of these properties was a collaborative effort, management responsibilities will be assumed by Larimer County, with input from the other partners.

The purpose of this document is to: 1) define the management objectives for Long View Farm; 2) provide the formal program and policy guidelines that will direct the management and use of the Long View Farm well into the future; and 3) develop specific implementation strategies for carrying out various components of the management effort. The overall objectives of the plan are to:

- Protect, manage and enhance agricultural, natural and visual resources including maintaining and promoting healthy agricultural and ecological systems and their processes;
- Provide and promote appropriate safe and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities while minimizing detrimental impacts upon agricultural, natural and visual resources;
- Provide educational opportunities regarding the values of the surrounding agricultural (both present and historic), natural and visual resources and the importance of responsible use and stewardship of the land;
- Define implementation policies, programs, and responsibilities for the above goals as well as provide specific implementation steps where appropriate.

## **1.2 History**

Long View Farm, like much of the western corridor between Loveland and Fort Collins, has traditionally been used for dryland wheat farming for decades. As the two cities began to expand and threatened to grow together, eliminating both community identity and agricultural heritage, an effort was

made to preserve this open corridor through a citizens-based planning process. The result of this effort was *A Plan for The Region Between Fort Collins and Loveland* (1995) which identified the Long View Farm properties as critical open space. The need for corridor buffers between communities is also recognized in *The Northern Regional Planning Study* (1995), the Larimer County *Partnership Land Use System* (PLUS) (in progress), the *City of Fort Collins Comprehensive Master City Plan* (in process), and the *City of Loveland Comprehensive Master Plan* (1994 as amended). While these plans recognized the need for preserving Long View Farm as open space, the financial means were not available until the passage of the Help Preserve Open Spaces Sales tax in 1995. The acquisition of the Ute Farm and One Putt properties were among the first protection efforts implemented with this County-wide sales tax. The Buckner property was added later also using these funds.

### **1.3 Scope and Organization of the Plan**

The resource management plan for Long View Farm contains three major sections: 1) a review of existing conditions, including agricultural, natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources, 2) a discussion of opportunities, constraints, and planning issues related to management of the farm, and 3) a management plan addressing existing conditions, opportunities, constraints, and planning issues.

### **1.4 Public and Agency Involvement**

In November 1996, Larimer County hosted a public meeting to present a number of projects that were being considered for protection as open space. Attendees of the meeting heartily supported the Long View Farm project for its value as a community separator and its role to protect scenic views and important agricultural land. The local partners sponsoring this project – the Cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, and Larimer County – concurred with these reasons for protection and included the possibility of a trail along the northern edge. The Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board and the Board of County Commissioners, as well as the Advisory Boards and City Councils of Loveland and Fort Collins, voted to support the acquisition of Long View Farm. With funding and partnering support from Great Outdoors Colorado, Long View Farm was acquired, thereby securing the future protection of the land.

This management plan has been reviewed by the Cities of Loveland and Fort Collins, the current lessee of the property, the North Loudon Ditch Company, and Great Outdoors Colorado. It was also presented to the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board prior to its adoption. Public comment on this plan was encouraged and welcome at the Open Lands Advisory Board meeting, and considered in the final version.

## **2. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **2.1 Overview**

Long View Farm consists predominantly of 598.5 acres of dryland wheat farming encompassing nearly an entire section of land (Section 23, Township 6 North, Range 69 West of the 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian) located between the City of Fort Collins and Loveland. Situated between the intersections of County Road 32 and County Road 30 with U.S. 287 and Shields Street providing the east and west boundaries respectively, the property was purchased with the intent of maintaining its agricultural character with a possible trail corridor along the northern edge of the property. The protection of Long View Farm as agricultural open space is a component of a larger vision focusing on the preservation of a section of the Fort Collins/Loveland corridor that extends from U.S. 287 west to the foothills. This large open expanse of dryland wheat farming preserves the rural character of the corridor between Fort Collins and Loveland while maintaining the separate community identities of Fort Collins and Loveland. The implementation of this larger vision is in process with the protection of adjacent property by the City of Fort Collins to the west and northwest of Long View Farm.

### **2.2 Natural Resources**

#### **a. Climate**

The climate responsible for influencing Long View Farm can be characterized as semiarid with a strong seasonal variation in temperatures, abundant sunshine and relatively low precipitation.

The average maximum daily temperature (F) is approximately 70 degrees or above during five months of the year (May through September), with the daily average maximum reaching approximately 85 degrees in July and August. High temperatures occasionally exceed 100 degrees, but nights are generally cool, with an average low during the summer months of approximately 54 degrees. Winters are generally cold but are characterized by substantial swings in temperature. January is the coldest month with an average daily maximum of 41.5 degrees and an average daily minimum of 13.6 degrees. The lowest temperature during the period of record is minus 41 degrees.

Average annual precipitation is 14.4 inches, with the highest amount occurring in May. Average annual snowfall is approximately 50 inches; most snow melts quickly once on the ground.

Prevailing winds are from the north-northwest during the winter months and from the south-southeast in the summer. Late winter and early spring are usually the period of strongest winds and velocities in excess of 100 miles per hour have been recorded. Strong winds resulting from thunderstorms are also fairly common in summer and wind direction associated with these storms is often from the north-northwest. Wind direction, however, can be highly variable.

#### **b. Topography**

The eastern three-quarters of Long View Farm consists of slightly rolling terrain on top of a small plateau or butte. The western quarter of the property consists predominantly of the steeper upper slopes of the butte blending into the more gently sloping base of the butte. The slopes of the butte run from north to south. Total elevation change across the property varies by approximately 150 feet.

**c. Soils**

The underlying soils of Long View Farm are generally moderately deep, well drained soils that are suited to crop farming. Of note is the predominance of Nunn Clay Loam underlying most of the eastern two-thirds of the site which qualifies as High Potential Dry Cropland, a category of “Farmlands of Statewide Importance”. Historically, these properties have been in agricultural use. Aerial photographs dating back to 1963 show the properties in their current use - dryland wheat farming. Documentation regarding the use of the land prior to 1963 is not readily available, although it may be assumed that the properties were either used for dryland wheat farming or ranching for much of their post-European settlement history. The current dryland wheat farming lease originated in 1989.

**d. Hydrology**

Wetland areas are limited to two locations: 1) a wet area located at the northeast end of the property caused by seepage from the North Loudon Ditch which crosses the property in this vicinity; and 2) a farmed wetland at the southeast corner of the property that was created due to the blockage of drainage by U.S. 287 and the entrance to the adjacent proposed industrial park site. Both wetlands were identified and classified during a 1996 study during which Larimer County identified and evaluated wetlands roughly occurring within the urban area of the county (Cooper, David J. and Merritt, David M. *Larimer Partnership Land Use System Proposed Wetland Classification and Protection Program*, March 29, 1996). See **Vegetation** section for further discussion.

**e. Vegetation**

There are four main vegetation types on Long View Farm in areas not utilized for dryland wheat farming: 1) cottonwood stands along the North Loudon Ditch; 2) cattail wetlands and wet meadows adjacent to the northeast side of the ditch, resulting from water leakage from the ditch; 3) the farmed wetland on the southeast corner; and 4) semi-arid scrubland along the upper slopes of the butte. Major vegetation types are shown in Map 2.1 and include the cultivated area. No rare, threatened or endangered species are known to inhabit the site.

Cottonwood stands. The northeast corner of Long View Farm is dissected by the North Loudon Ditch. Several stands of mature cottonwoods (*Populus* sp.) have become established along the ditch and its adjacent service road.

Cattail wetlands and wet meadows. Due to seepage from the North Loudon Ditch, the northeast corner of Long View Farms has developed into a cattail marsh and wet meadows. Species that have been located in this area include: cattail (*Typha* sp.), showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), curly dock (*Rumex crispus*), common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), nodding beggarticks (*Bidens cernua*), bunch grass, tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), dogbane (*Apocynum cannabinum*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), willow (*Salix* sp.), Kochia weed (*Kochia scoparia*), and grey rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*). Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is also found throughout this area. (See Exotic Plants and Noxious Weeds). Although this wetland was included in Larimer County's wetland inventory in 1996, it was defined as Potential Wetland - Unverified due to limited access to the site at the time.

Farmed wetland. The wetland on the southeast corner of the site was identified in the 1996 study as a palustrine bare wetland, a subset of a palustrine marsh which is a seasonally or perennially inundated wetland characterized by standing water and emergent herbaceous vegetation adapted to saturated soil conditions. This wetland is created when water is trapped in the southeast corner of the site by the road that provides access to the proposed industrial park to the south. The source of water has not been confirmed, but a majority of the water likely comes from runoff. Because it is farmed, vegetation that would naturally occur here does not become established and the wetland is usually seen as open water with wheat on its fringes and/or dry soil.

This wetland was evaluated by Cooper and Merritt as having low importance (2) in a local or regional context, because it appeared to perform few functions such as water quality, flood storage, groundwater recharge, etc. Additionally, the wetland received a low quality rating (2), meaning that it was highly impacted (due to farming), appeared degraded, and has a high potential for restoration. It received the lowest rating (1) for sensitivity to human use because there are no known sensitive species at or using the site. Overall, this wetland was ranked as a Class 2 wetland.

Semi-arid scrubland. The semi-arid scrubland occurs on the uncultivated west-facing slopes of the butte. Species located in this area include: great plains yucca (*Yucca glauca*), plains prickly pear (*Opuntia polyacantha*), common mullein, gray rabbitbrush, smooth brome, fringed sage (*Artemisia frigida*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), skunkbrush (*Rhus trilobata*), locoweed (*Oxytropis sericea*), snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), and pussytoe (*Antennaria* sp.).

Exotic Plants and Noxious Weeds. Some exotic plants and noxious weeds have become established as a result of historic land use as well as natural introductions from surrounding areas. Species of concern are Russian olive, Canada thistle and bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). Other known exotics include several bromes (*Bromus tectorum*, *B. japonicus*, *B. inermis*). Some of these weeds are associated with the cultivated area, while others may be found in the natural areas. Of those found, Canada thistle, which has been located in the wet meadow area, is the only weed that is regulated by Larimer County.

Historically, and under the current lease agreement, it is the responsibility of the farmer to control those weeds in the cultivated area, which is done one time per year. In 1998, the farmer sprayed 1/10<sup>th</sup> of an ounce of Ally<sup>®</sup> and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a pint of 2-4D<sup>®</sup> (low-volatile #6) on the cultivated area to control weeds.

The summer fallow area is sprayed yearly with 12 ounces of Round-Up®, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> pint of 2-4D®, 2/10<sup>th</sup> of a pound of Sprasul® (an ammonium sulfate), and 2 ounces of activator. Canada thistle is controlled by spot spraying 1 pint of Tordon®, 1 quart of 2-4D® (low volatile #6), 1 pint of Round-up® and 2 ounces of activator.

#### **f. Wildlife**

Because of its use as agricultural land and its location between major transportation corridors, Long View Farm is not considered high value wildlife habitat. The site is primarily agricultural, does not contain much topographic variation or vegetative cover, and therefore does not support resident populations of large mammals. However, animals such as deer, fox, and coyote may pass through the site. Although at the time of purchase no prairie dogs or prairie dog colonies were located on Long View Farm, a colony was identified on the City of Fort Collins-owned property directly north of the Buckner portion of Long View Farm.

Canada geese frequent the site during the winter months, using the fields as a feeding ground. The current lease allows the lessee to sublease the site for hunting, with income from the hunting lease to be divided between the lessor and lessee, one-third and two-thirds, respectively.

The edges around the cultivated area, the limestone rock outcrop on the west, the cottonwood grove along the ditch, and the seep and wetlands may support resident populations of smaller mammals, amphibians, reptiles and birds.

### **2.3 Visual Resources**

Long View Farm provides open vistas of the Front Range between Loveland and Fort Collins, including views of agricultural land, ridgelines, hogbacks, and high alpine mountains including Longs and Meeker Peaks. These views are seen by the thousands of travelers along U.S. 287 looking west. Drivers along heavily traveled Taft Hill Road and Shields Street look east to the property and again are provided with a view of agricultural land and a modest rock outcrop running north to south. The practice of dryland wheat farming creates interesting and changing colors and patterns associated with the seasons. These appeal not only to the eye, but to a communal sense of importance of agriculture in Larimer County history as well as our everyday lives.

### **2.4 Cultural Resources**

There are no known significant cultural resources on Long View Farm. It should be noted, however, that a cultural survey has not been conducted. A small stone foundation and a cistern or well have been located north of the Loudon Ditch where it crosses U.S. 287. The history of the foundation and cistern is unknown. The continuation of the practice of agriculture on this land, however, will help preserve the agricultural tradition and history of Larimer County.

## 2.5 Socioeconomic Resources

### a. Long View Farm Land Status

Long View Farm consists of approximately 598.5 acres that were purchased by Larimer County, Fort Collins, and Loveland for the purposes of protecting the corridor separating Fort Collins and Loveland and to preserve the agricultural heritage in this area. The majority of the land, excepting a rock outcrop on the western portion of the property, is used for dryland wheat farming. It is the intention of this plan that the land continue to be used in this manner until such time that it becomes economically impractical. There is no public access to the property at this time.

*Easements:* There are several utility easements providing for telephone lines, electric lines, an irrigation canal and water lines. The locations of those that are described in the title commitments for the original properties are shown on Map 2.2. In addition, a sign indicating the presence of an underground gas line on the north end of the Buckner property was noted during a site visit. There is no mention of this gas easement, however, in any of the title commitments possibly suggesting an inappropriately placed sign. Locations of the easements for the Ute Farm and One Putt properties are shown on the survey maps (ALTA/ACSM Land Title Survey, Sear-Brown Group, February 21, 1997 and February 11, 1997 respectively). The existence of these easements in no way interfere with the current use of the property as farmland and are not anticipated to interfere with such use of the land in the future.

The electrical easements granted to the Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association, Inc. do not specify an exact location. Currently the electric lines run along U.S. 287. The Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association, Inc. has expressed a willingness to vacate the unspecified location easements in return for surveying their current lines and establishing an easement in the current location.

The North Loudon Ditch Company retains an easement for the irrigation and canal and incidental purposes, including maintaining a road along the ditch specifically for ditch maintenance.

A 40-foot wide roadway easement is granted to the Union Pacific Land Resource Corp. In addition, an exception refers to the U.S. 287 right-of-way that is currently established and used. The railroad maintains a 100 foot easement on either side of the center line of the railroad line.

Since the acquisition of Long View Farm, two additional easements either have been granted or are in the process of being granted. On the south side of the property, a right-of-way has been conveyed to the adjacent industrial park to allow for a realignment of their entrance road. As a part of the terms for this right-of-way, the adjacent owners have agreed to develop a scenic pullout along the entrance road. This will allow the public to enjoy the scenic vistas of Long View Farm while avoiding traffic hazard problems on U.S. 287.

The second easement, which is currently in process, involves the placement of a sewer line on the northeast corner of the property to accommodate residential development to the north of Long View

Farm. The sewer line was installed in late 1997 or early 1998. Discussion is currently underway to address the formal granting of the easement and the appropriate levels of compensation.

*Mineral rights.* At the time of sale, all rights, title and interest to all minerals and mineral rights, including oil, gas, coal, gravel and other minerals, located in, on, or under the surface of the property were conveyed to Larimer County. However, according with past public records, the mineral rights associated with Long View Farms are predominantly owned by the Union Pacific Railway Company. It is not expected that these rights will be exercised due to an instrument recorded December 13, 1983 and noted in exception line item 9 of the Ute Farm/One Putt title insurance, that specifies that the Union Pacific Railway Company “relinquished its rights to enter upon or damage the surface of the land.”

*Water Rights.* There are no water rights associated with this property.

*Agriculture.* Historically, these properties have been in agricultural use. Aerial photographs dating back to 1963 show the properties in their current use - dryland wheat farming. Documentation regarding the use of the land prior to 1963 is not readily available although it may be assumed that the properties were in either dryland wheat farming or ranching use for much of their post-European settlement history. The current dryland wheat farming lease originated in 1989.

*Structures and Trash.* There are no buildings on the site. Water and sewer manholes are located in the northeast corner of the property.

Historic users of the property have dumped or left behind tires and farming implements in two or three scattered locations. There is not enough debris in any one location to call them dumps and they do not interfere with agricultural practices nor do they effect any of the other values of the property.

Due to its historic and consistent use as agricultural land, and the comprehensive planting of the land, it is not believed that hazardous materials exist on Long View Farm. No Phase I Assessment has been performed, however the Larimer County Environmental Health Department has reviewed their records of known dumping sites and determined that there are no known sites on the property. There is some concern that, due to its proximity to the railroad and historic brick kiln just west of the railroad that the potential exists for soil and groundwater contamination from historic use of the brick kiln, illegal dumping at that site and/or cargo leaks and/or spills along the railroad.

## **b. Adjacent Land Use**

At the time of this writing, the only development immediately adjacent to the boundaries of Long View Farm is an industrial building near the southern property boundary. However, several developments on property to the north and south are imminent.

On the east, Long View Farm is bordered by U.S. 287, a major north-south travel route. Just to the east of U.S. 287, opposite the Highway from Long View Farm, is a residential subdivision with a 300 foot development setback from the highway.

To the north of the property is a combination of proposed development and open space. A mixed use planned development known as Ridgewood Hills and Shenandoah will share most of the northern border of Long View Farm. Development plans show a mix of residential and commercial uses planned along this area. The City of Fort Collins owns property directly north of the original Buckner piece of Long View Farm. Its shared boundary includes roughly the western third of Long View Farm's north boundary. This City-owned piece is and will continue to be undeveloped and used for open space. It is not farmed, and is currently supporting an active prairie dog colony.

Immediately west of the property, but still east of Shields Street is the railroad right-of-way and a privately owned sliver of land that is currently undeveloped. Only a decrepit silo is located here, a remnant from a former brick making operation. This previous use, in addition to suspected illegal dumping of trash and other substances, may have contaminated underlying soils and groundwater. Contamination, if it is present, could have migrated easterly to Long View Farm.

To the west, across Shields Street, is land previously known as the McKee Trust lands until its purchase by the City of Fort Collins in 1998 for use as agricultural open space.

On the south end, the City of Loveland has approved an industrial park. A paved road that will provide access to this area has been constructed along the eastern half of the southern boundary of Long View Farm.

**c. Access, Circulation and Traffic.**

The only access into the site is along the ditch maintenance road located on the northeastern boundary adjacent to U.S. 287. An access road to the industrial development area south of Long View Farm may be used in the future to provide a small scenic turnout and interpretive site. Other than this, there are no roads or paths on the interior of the site.

The City of Loveland's *East - West Mobility* proposes a future extension of County Road 32 from its present terminus at U.S. 287, two miles west to County Road 19, as an alternative to use of US 34. If extended, this road would be located on the northern boundary of Long View Farm and would be a paved, two-lane arterial. This proposal is currently under consideration by Larimer County and the City of Fort Collins.

### **3. OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS, AND PLANNING ISSUES**

#### **3.1 Overview**

The following section addresses issues and concerns that are relevant to managing Long View Farm in the future. These issues may be divided into four components: 1) agricultural resources, 2) natural resources, 3) visual and cultural resources, and 4) outdoor recreation and environmental education. The recommendations made in later sections in this document present different ways to address these concerns and perpetually manage this property for the purposes for which it was acquired.

#### **3.2 Agricultural Opportunities, Constraints and Planning Issues**

- *Protect, manage and enhance agricultural, natural, cultural, and visual resources including maintaining and promoting healthy agricultural and ecological systems and their processes.*

The maintenance of agriculture on Long View Farm is the key to protecting and enhancing all the other values associated with the site including cultural, visual, recreational and natural resources.

*Agricultural opportunities* associated with the property include:

- Maintaining the property in agricultural use will help preserve the agricultural heritage in the Fort Collins and Loveland area.
- Continued leasing of the property will provide income to the County that will offset maintenance expenses.

*Constraints and planning issues* associated with the agricultural use of the land are:

- It must be economically feasible to maintain this land in agriculture in order to attract a farmer to farm it.
- If the land cannot be maintained in agriculture for a significant amount of time, alternative use(s), that do not impair the visual, natural, and cultural values of the land, may be considered.
- The lack of water limits the types of crops that can be cultivated here.
- Problems associated with adjacent urban-type development might inhibit the practice of agriculture on Long View Farm. Some of those problems might include trespass onto and unauthorized use of the Long View Farm land, traffic, spread of noxious weeds, dumping of trash onto the property and complaints from adjacent neighbors regarding dust, loud machinery, and the use of pesticides to manage weeds.
- The use of sound, local farming customs must be encouraged.

### 3.3 Natural Resources Issues and Concerns

- *Protect, manage and enhance agricultural, natural, cultural, and visual resources including maintaining and promoting healthy agricultural and ecological systems and their processes.*

While a relatively small area of Long View Farm is in an untilled, natural state, it is important to maintain these remnant areas in an ecologically sound manner.

*Natural resource opportunities* for Long View Farm include:

- Restoration and enhancement of existing wetlands may provide quality habitat for wetlands species.
- Maintenance of cottonwood stands along the irrigation ditch will ensure ongoing habitat for perching raptors and other birds.
- In the event that the agricultural use of the land is no longer economically viable, the future potential conversion of the land to native prairie offers new habitat for prairie nesting birds and other prairie wildlife.
- In the event that the agricultural use of the land is no longer economically viable, the future potential relocation of prairie dogs to this site will provide an increased food base for raptors as well as alleviate prairie dog problems in other locations.

*Constraints and planning issues* identified with the natural resources associated with the property are:

- Promoting and encouraging the use of the site by large mammals could be dangerous to the animals given the surrounding land uses.
- Invasion of noxious weeds threatens the health of plant and animal life.
- Weed management responsibilities adjacent to the ditch have not been clearly defined.
- Soils around the limestone rock outcrop are thin and subject to erosion if improperly used.
- Animal species may be disturbed by agricultural or recreational use.
- Portions of the property might be contaminated from off-site sources.
- No formal inventory of plants, including noxious weeds, or animals has been performed.
- The habitat value of the farmed wetland on the southeast corner of Long View could be improved.
- As the surrounding land to the north and south is developed, goose hunting may pose safety concerns.

### 3.4 Visual and Cultural Resources Issues and Concerns

- *Protect, manage and enhance agricultural, natural, cultural, and visual resources including maintaining and promoting healthy agricultural and ecological systems and their processes.*

Visual resources are particularly important given the role of the Long View Farm as a community separator for Fort Collins and Loveland.

***Visual and cultural resources opportunities*** include:

- Continued leasing of the property for dryland wheat production will preserve the scenic green and brown and gold and brown texture provided by strip cropping in a wheat fallow rotation.
- Historical and cultural value may be determined for the existing for the stone foundation and cistern on the property.

***Constraints*** and planning issues associated with visual and cultural resources are:

- There is a significant amount of information that could be conveyed regarding the role of agriculture, both historically and present day, in Larimer County using Long View Farm as an example.
- Historic use of the stone foundation and cistern is unknown.
- Large portions of the site are highly visible from a variety of viewpoints making any use of it apparent. Alterations from current use to another type of use or the construction of buildings would be seen by many. Buildings and tall vegetation would impair views of the mountains seen from U.S. 287.
- Maintaining the open character of the land through agriculture is preferable to open prairie.

### **3.5 Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Education Issues and Concerns**

- *Provide and promote appropriate safe and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities while minimizing detrimental impacts upon agricultural, natural and visual resources.*
- *Provide educational opportunities regarding the values of the surrounding agricultural (both present and historic), natural and visual resources and the importance of responsible use and stewardship of the land.*

***Outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities*** include:

- A regional trail connection may be possible on the north boundary of the property that would run from the Coyote Ridge Natural Area to U.S. 287.
- A scenic pullout with an education kiosk may be possible on the south end of the property that would enable the public to learn about Larimer County's agricultural heritage while enjoying scenic views of the Front Range mountain backdrop.

***Constraints and planning issues*** associated with potential outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities are:

- Recreation on the site should not interfere with and should be subordinate to agriculture.
- Education is needed regarding the role of agriculture in Larimer County and efforts to protect its future.
- Trail or other use should be located so as to minimize conflicts with agriculture and wildlife.
- Recreation should not conflict with ditch maintenance.
- If a trail is located generally along the north boundary, there could be potential conflicts between trail users and adjacent, off-site home and/or business owners.
- A trail along the northern boundary must address concerns associated with crossing the railroad tracks, crossing U.S. 287, and access from streets to the trail.
- If County Road 32 is extended in the future, a trail could be part of the road system.
- Consider access to the trail off of local roads.

## 4. MANAGEMENT PLAN

### 4.1 Overview

To meet the purpose and objectives of the Long View Farm Management Plan, the plan is divided into four main components: 1) agricultural resource management; 2) natural resource management; 3) visual resource management; and 4) recreation and education opportunities. These four components, while addressed separately are interrelated and will impact and influence each other. Each component includes recommendations for implementation. A suggested timetable for implementation of each step is included in section 4-6.

### 4.2 Agricultural Resource Management

Agricultural resource management addresses the long term maintenance of agricultural use of Long View Farm. Maintenance of the property in agriculture and the use of sound agricultural practices will ensure the long-term economic viability of the property as well as preserve the scenic values of the land. ***The continued use of Long View Farm in agricultural practices is the top priority for the land.***

Historically, this property has been used for dryland wheat farming utilizing strip cropping in a wheat fallow rotation designed to protect soils from erosion and to replenish soil moisture. This agricultural practice is strongly encouraged by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. While a sound agricultural practice, this approach also is responsible for the scenic texture of the plains landscape of alternating rows of green and brown or gold and brown, depending on the season. The continued use of this sound agricultural practice should be encouraged.

***In the event that agricultural practices are no longer economically viable,*** conversion of this property to a native grass prairie may be desirable. The appropriateness of this future vision should be assessed under the social, political, and practical considerations at such time. Larimer County, Fort Collins, and Loveland also may wish to explore the possibility of utilizing the site as a receiving area for prairie dog relocation. The size of the property and the location are ideal for supporting a large prairie dog colony that could serve as a food base for area raptors including overwintering bald eagles at Fossil Creek Reservoir.

Finally, the future impact of encroaching development on the north and south side of the property must be addressed by working with adjacent landowners and developers.

*Implementation steps:*

***Use sound agricultural practices***

- Establish annual or biannual leases with participating farmer.

- Meet with the farmer periodically to discuss cultivation techniques, crop yield, concerns with adjacent landowners, wildlife, etc. May be done in conjunction with lease signing.
- Periodically consult with CSU Agricultural Extension Office and Natural Resources Conservation Service regarding updated agricultural practices.
- Remove all trash piles and debris from the property.
- Monitor annually for new trash piles.

***Work with adjacent landowners***

- Meet with adjacent developers to discuss the use of Long View Farm, the potential conflicts associated with adjacent urban and rural uses. Discuss methods for mitigating any potential conflict such as maximizing setbacks for key commercial and residential buildings, building a fence along the shared boundary, erecting signs along the boundary to discourage trespass and dumping, and including a brochure in potential homeowners' information packets regarding the presence of agriculture.
- Work with the City of Fort Collins regarding the possible installation of prairie dog barriers to prevent the spread of the existing prairie dog colony from adjacent City property to Long View Farm while the property is used for agricultural purposes.

**4.3 Natural Resources Management**

Natural resources management addresses the health and dynamics of the plant and animal communities found on Long View Farm. For purposes of this plan, natural resources management is grouped into three categories: 1) vegetation management; 2) noxious weed management; and 3) wildlife management.

**Vegetation management.** While a minor part of the property, the proper stewardship of two wetland areas, the cottonwood stands, and the buttes should be addressed. The farmed wetland on the southeast side of the property is the result of drainage blocked by U.S. 287 and may have marginal value as a wetland. Nevertheless, the site should be assessed to determine the desirability of restoring the area to a wetland. The wetland on the northeast side is infested with Canada thistle and possibly other exotics. Appropriate treatment for restoring health and vitality to the area should be researched, exploring alternative treatments such as burning, spraying, re-seeding etc. Independent of other restoration efforts, Russian olive trees should be removed from the property.

The cottonwood stands, established along the irrigation ditch, have visual value for a future trail and wildlife value but negatively impact the dispersion of irrigation water due to high water absorbency rates. Generally, cottonwood re-establishment should be left to the natural re-seeding processes without active planting. Open communications with the Loudon Ditch Company should be maintained regarding ditch maintenance to encourage the continued existence of healthy cottonwood stands while recognizing the need for the ditch company to maintain the ditch and conserve water flows.

Maintenance of the buttes in a natural state will not require any specific steps other than a periodic check for trash, debris, and erosion.

*Implementation steps:*

- Perform vegetation inventory throughout the site, using a qualified botanist or biologist.
- Assess the wetland and agricultural values of the farmed wetland in the southeast corner of the property to determine the appropriateness of wetland restoration. Take steps to restore the wetland if appropriate.
- Develop an enhancement and restoration strategy for the northeast wetlands that includes plants to be removed, plants to be established and goals for wildlife. Explore restoration and monitoring efforts that would utilize volunteers. Coordinate efforts with the Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM).
- Implement the wetlands enhancement and restoration strategy.
- Remove Russian olive trees and saplings.
- Work with the North Loudon Ditch Company to maintain the health and viability of the cottonwood stands along the ditch.

**Noxious weed management.** Currently, there is a known infestation of Canada thistle on the northeast corner of the property. In adherence to County weed policy, noxious weeds should be eliminated from the property.

*Implementation steps:*

- Identify and map noxious weed infestations as defined by the Colorado Department of Agriculture.
- Discuss weed management with the North Loudon Ditch Company to delineate and define areas and limits of responsibility.
- Develop an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM) for noxious weed control and restoration.
- Implement the IPM Plan utilizing county staff, including annual monitoring. Explore restoration and proactive control measures that may include volunteer effort.
- Work with the farmer to incorporate the IPM Plan into his practice.

**Wildlife management.** Generally, Long View Farm is not an ideal location for wildlife use. Close proximity of U.S. 287 and the travel barriers of Taft Hill/Wilson and Shields/Taft render Long View Farm as potentially hazardous for large mammals and other wildlife. Consequently, careful thought should be given to the creation of potential wildlife habitat, assessing the benefits of the habitat against the fatality potential for the wildlife. For example, the farm is an undesirable location for deer and elk, but may be quite beneficial for relocating prairie dogs. At this time, Long View Farm will be kept in an agricultural use and wildlife management strategies will be minimal.

*Implementation steps:*

- Inventory, through documented sightings and tracks, types of wildlife that use this site.
- Annually review the feasibility of and safety issues associated with goose hunting on Long View Farm. Work with lessee to assure that appropriate safety measures are addressed in subleasing to hunters.

#### **4.4 Visual and Cultural Resource Management**

Long View Farm has been identified as an important visual resource, preserving Larimer County's heritage of dryland wheat fields against a background of hogback ridges and foothill slopes. Continued agricultural practices as addressed above will continue to preserve the critical scenic value of this property. Any structural modifications to the property such as signage, educational kiosks, etc. should be designed in such a way as to preserve this conservation value.

Cultural resources on the property entail the stone foundation and cistern located on the northeast corner of the property. Additional information regarding these structures are needed.

##### *Implementation steps:*

- Using volunteers, research the history of the stone foundation and cistern to determine their role and importance. If they are culturally valuable, develop a protection and enhancement plan and an interpretive sign or program to describe their history and significance.

#### **4.5 Outdoor Recreation and Education Management**

Recreation management generally refers to people management and the management of recreational facilities. The primary conservation values associated with Long View Farm are its role as a community buffer, scenic values and agricultural values. Recreational opportunities are secondary to protecting these values. At most, a trail and educational kiosk would be located here at some time in the future.

The anticipated location of a trail would be along the northern perimeter of the property. In addition to minimizing any impact on the scenic and agricultural values of the property, it is important in designing the location of any future trail that fragile soil conditions and sensitive wildlife habitat be considered. Trail designs should include connectivity to a larger regional trail network in order for the trail to have genuine recreational value. The location of the trail should also address the possibility of a County Road 32 extension along the northern perimeter of the property. In developing a trail design it will be important to: 1) work with county and regional transportation planners to assess the likelihood of CR 32 extension along the northern boundary and the likelihood and desirability of a detached trail along its way; 2) work with local developers regarding the placement of a trailhead at the end of an adjacent street with access to the trail; and 3) work with the North Loudon Ditch Company regarding placement of a trail along the ditch maintenance road or adjacent to the road.

With the development of a scenic pullout at the south end of the property, adjacent to the industrial development site, an opportunity also exists to provide educational information regarding the agricultural and scenic values of the property. While the industrial park will develop the framework of a pullout along their entrance road, Larimer County will be responsible for completion of the pullout, including delineating parking spaces and the development and placement of an education kiosk.

*Implementation steps:*

- Develop a regional trail concept that identifies offsite connecting trail opportunities.
- Develop an onsite trail strategy identifying an appropriate location for a trail and trailhead that would not significantly impact farming operation, wildlife, or sensitive soils and /or vegetation.
- Implement trail and trailhead.
- Develop educational signage that would discourage visitors from trespassing onto adjacent property and onto cultivated land.
- Finish construction and development of scenic turnout.
- Develop an interpretive kiosk to be located at the scenic turnout that includes information about agriculture in Larimer County, dryland wheat farming, the interface between agriculture, wildlife and urban uses, Larimer County's Open Lands Program and the cooperation of the various municipalities and entities (Cities of Fort Collins and Loveland, Great Outdoors Colorado, Larimer County) that helped conserve this land.
- Develop permanent signage identifying Long View Farm from U.S. 287 and CR 17.

#### **4.6 Summary of Implementation Steps and Phasing**

A tabular summary of implementation steps and proposed timelines is provided below. These steps will be prioritized and implemented as budget and time allows.

**Table 1. Summary of Implementation steps for the Long View Farm Management Plan.**

<b>Open Space Management Implementation Steps</b>	<b>Estimated Cost \$\$</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001 and beyond</b>	<b>Responsible program*</b>
<b>Agricultural resources management</b>					
Establish annual/biannual leases with participating farmer.	0	Spring	As needed	As needed	Open Lands Program
Meet with farmer periodically.	0	Spring	As needed	As needed	Open Lands Program
Consult with CSU Ag. Extension & NRCS.	0	Spring		As needed	Open Lands Program
Remove all trash piles and debris.	minimal	Spring	As needed	As needed	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Monitor annually for new trash piles	minimal	Summer	Summer	Summer	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Meet with developers to minimize conflict.	0	As needed	As needed	As needed	Open Lands Program
Work with City of Fort Collins regarding prairie dog barriers	\$4,500/mi	As needed	As needed	As needed	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
<b>Natural resources management: vegetation</b>					
Perform vegetation inventory.	Volunteers		Spring		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
Assess wetland and agricultural values of farmed wetland.	Volunteers		Spring		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
Create wetland enhancement & restoration strategy for northeast wetland.	Volunteers	Fall	Winter		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
Implement wetlands enhancement and restoration strategy.	Unknown		As needed	As needed	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Remove Russian olive trees and saplings.	Minimal	1999	As needed	As needed	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Work with ditch company to protect cottonwoods.	0	Spring		As needed	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
<b>Natural resources management: noxious weeds</b>					
Identify and map weed infestations.	Minimal	Spring/summer			Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Delineate and define areas of responsibility with North Loudon Ditch Company.	Minimal				Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Develop Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM).	Minimal	Spring/summer			Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Implement IPM with annual monitoring/inventory.	\$500/year	Spring/summer	Annual	Annual	Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Work with farmer to integrate IPM into practice.	0		Spring		Facilities, Properties, and Construction
<b>Natural resources management: wildlife</b>					
Inventory wildlife use.	Volunteer		Year round		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
Annually review feasibility and safety of goose hunting	0	Annual	Annual	Annual	Park Ranger and Volunteer Program

<b>Visual and cultural resources management</b>					
Research significance of stone foundation and cistern and develop interpretation plan if appropriate.	Volunteer		2000		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
<b>Outdoor recreation and education management</b>					
Develop regional trail concept and connections	0	1999			Open Lands Program
Locate trail/trailhead considering fragile soils, future road, access along ditch, and access from adjacent future streets.	Minimal		2000		Open Lands Program
Implement trail/trailhead	\$50,000/mi				Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Develop “no trespassing” signs.	\$100		2000		Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Finish development of scenic turnout	\$1,000-2,000	1999			Facilities, Properties, and Construction
Develop interpretive kiosk for pullout.	\$1,500-2,000		2000		Park Ranger and Volunteer Program
Develop permanent signage	\$1,600-2,000	1999			Open Lands Program
* Note that while various programs may be responsible for a particular task, the implementation of the task may involve cross-program cooperation and participation as well as the use of volunteers. All volunteer activity will be developed and organized by the Volunteer Coordinator located in the Park Rangers and Volunteer Services Program.					

## 5. APPENDIX A

### Baseline Inventory Photos and Map of Photo Points