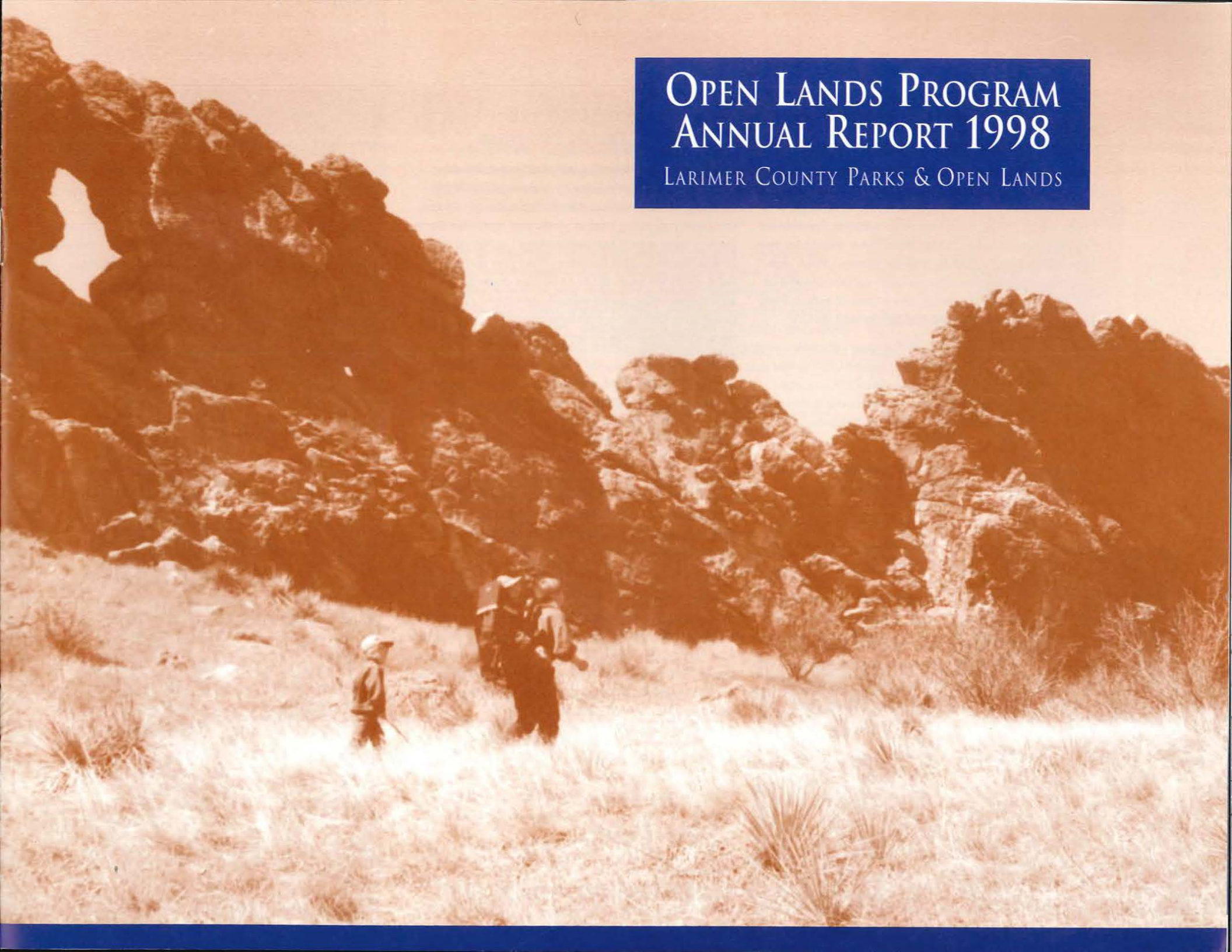


# OPEN LANDS PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT 1998

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS & OPEN LANDS





# 1999 A message from the chairman Will Be a Pivotal Year for the Open Lands Program

Three years ago we began a new venture in Larimer County, one founded on the belief of our citizens that the special places defining this County were worth protecting. Places like the Devil's Backbone, Rattlesnake Park, or Coyote Ridge. These places have shaped Larimer County and they resonate with its history. Since 1996, the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax has allowed us to protect these and other areas—a total of almost 8000 acres county-wide. Some highlights in 1998 include;

The Devil's Backbone is one of the most dramatic hogbacks along the Front Range. This fall, the public will have the opportunity to hike along the unspoiled eastern edge of the backbone, secure in the knowledge that a major portion of this landmark has been preserved.

Horsetooth Mountain is a beloved landmark for much of Larimer County. This year we added nearly 400 acres to this park, including the home- stead of one of the County's pioneer families. This historic setting will

soon become a visitor's center, adding to the park's enjoyment while protecting a portion of the mountain's most vulnerable landscape

The Blue Mountain Bison Ranch, a 4,100 acre ranch that takes in portions of the Little Thompson River drainage, the west side of Blue Mountain and Rattlesnake Park. A conservation easement will ensure that this magnificent landscape, perhaps the largest undivided holding remaining in the southern foothills, will remain undeveloped.

We should all share in the sense of accomplishment each of these projects brings. At the same time, it's difficult not to be daunted by the task ahead. In 1996, the County took the lead in protecting Long View Farm, the last large parcel remaining along U.S. 287 in the Loveland/Fort Collins Corridor. Now, just three years later, could we even afford to do this project? With land values rising astronomically and many vital areas facing ever-increasing pressures for development, we need to consider how to protect additional areas before it's too late.

The Open Lands Board and Staff are working hard to maximize the available funding and are actively engaged with a number of landowners to review protection options. Additional projects in the southern foothills, the Devil's Backbone vicinity, the Fossil Creek Reservoir area—these and other projects are all under active consideration. Without additional funding, however, it won't be possible to accomplish many of the open space protection priorities facing Larimer County.

For this reason, one of our priorities is to review options for augmenting available funding. This may include going back to the voters for a continuation of the existing Help Preserve Open Spaces initiative and asking for bonding authority so that funds are available now when the need is the greatest. If we wait even a few years to take these actions, land prices may have doubled or tripled. Or, in many cases, the property will no longer be available at all.

The coming year will be pivotal—one marked by several significant new projects as well as thoughtful consideration of additional strategies for protecting our open space heritage in Larimer County.



Tom Keith,  
Chair, Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board

*A message from the director*

## Look for New Facilities at Larimer County Parks

Thanks to support from the County Open Space sales tax, GOCO and the Bureau of Reclamation, we have been able to improve our regional parks. In 1998, the South Bay boat ramp at Horsetooth Reservoir was expanded from three lanes to six. Also, camping facilities were improved, including new restrooms. At Satanka Cove, the boat ramp was improved, and day use picnic areas and disabled accessible picnic sites were constructed.

Additional improvements planned for the South Bay camping area include electric hookups, drinking fountains and new pull-through sites with picnic tables, grates and landscaping. At Flatiron Reservoir we will install a new restroom, develop tent campsites and construct a disabled accessible fishing pier. At Carter lake, drinking water will be extended throughout the South Shore camping area. We are excited to provide these additional services to our customers!

Another major accomplishment this year was the passage of a 0.1% sales tax by Larimer County voters to acquire land to develop a new fairgrounds and events center. Community meetings will be held in 1999 asking citizens what types of activities they envision at the site.

And finally, in 1998 we received over \$1 million in grants and donations for land acquisitions and park improvements!

We look forward to this coming year and thank you for your continued support!



Greg Pickett,  
Director, Parks and Open Lands Department

*“ We've made great strides in protecting open space, however much work remains and funds are very limited. With land prices escalating and development pressure increasing, we must figure a way to afford to preserve our open space priorities before they're gone. ”*

Cheryl Olson,  
County Commissioner District 2



## Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

of the Larimer County Open Lands Program

The Mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program is to preserve and provide significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural diversity. Efforts to fulfill this mission will be guided by the following principles:

- Important open lands, natural areas, parks and trails are defined in the Help Preserve Open Spaces Initiative, the Larimer County Parks Master Plan, and other adopted plans.
- Available resources will be invested to achieve a balance between urgent, immediate demands and farsighted, long-range goals.
- Acquisition is fair to property owners, taxpayers and Larimer County citizens, and is from willing sellers only.
- An emphasis is focused on working with willing landowners to develop land-use alternatives and protection strategies that meet the landowner's financial needs and the County's goal to preserve significant open lands.
- Stewardship is very important. Larimer County will develop wise management policies that fit within fiscal resources. Development of trails and outdoor recreation facilities will minimize conflicts with wildlife needs and will be sensitive to the natural environment.
- Distribution of funds over time for open lands, parks and trails is balanced and fairly distributed throughout the county.
- Cooperation with partners is important to leverage available resources.

## The Devil's Backbone Nature Trail

In 1998, the Open Lands Program acquired 145 acres of one of the most dramatic Front Range hogbacks — the Devil's Backbone. This acquisition provides an exceptional opportunity for a nature trail, enabling visitors to experience the beauty and wonder of this impressive geologic landmark.

The Devil's Backbone Nature Trail will give visitors the opportunity to hike, run, observe wildlife and have close up views of the Backbone as well as long vistas of the region. Visitors will learn about the native flora, abundant fauna, remarkable geology and colorful history of the site. Also, visitors will learn how they can protect this valuable resource and actively participate in such programs as volunteer rangers, nature hike leaders, trail construction and maintenance.

Outstanding features of the Devil's Backbone include the impressive geologic land form of the Backbone itself, nesting raptors, a cliff swallow colony and native foothills vegetation. The rich cultural history of the Devil's Backbone adds to the importance of this landmark with the entrepreneurial activities of the Wild family.

Larimer County is currently developing a management plan for the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail anticipating that the trail will be open by Fall, 1999. The opening of this new trail will be an exciting event for the local community! For information about guided hikes during the summer, please call 679-4562.



Protecting the ancient Devil's Backbone provides opportunities for new discoveries.

## Open Lands Board Provides Diversity and Expertise

As a citizen advisory group, the Open Lands Board makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners regarding open space, regional park and trail acquisitions. The membership of the board represents a balance in geography, population and interest.

### Open Lands Board and Staff

Sitting l. to r.: Nancy Wallace, Greg Pickett, Eve Bassett, K-Lynn Cameron. Standing l. to r.: Tom Keith, Steve Ryder, Meegan Flenniken, Sue Tynan, Pete Salg, Daryl Burkhard, Tom Shoemaker, Kathy Gilliland, Larry Kendall, Wendall Amos, John Heaton. Not pictured: George Hix, Milan Karspeck, Merrill Kaufman, Linda Stanley, and Jerry White.





# 1998

## Acquisition & Improvement Highlights

**Coyote Ridge Expansion:** The Open Lands Program purchased 230 acres of land and protected 93 acres along the hogback ridgelines south of Horsetooth Reservoir. This acquisition will protect the ridgelines from future development, as well as provide a link in the regional trail system between Fort Collins and the Devil's Backbone.

*Total Cost: \$565,880*

**Long View Farm (Buckner):** Larimer County purchased 120 acres adjacent to Long View Farm and McKee Trust in the Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor. Linking these two open space properties will maintain agricultural production, serve as a scenic viewshed and provide a regional trail system linking Fort Collins and Loveland.

*Total Cost: \$562,000*



*Wild-life at the beach*

**Duck Lake (Williams):** The County negotiated a bargain sale for the acquisition of an 8-acre parcel contiguous to Duck Lake in the Fossil Creek Reservoir area. This acquisition will protect the sensitive wildlife habitat of Duck Lake and its associated wetlands.

*Total Cost: \$136,000*

**Devil's Backbone Nature Trail:** Open Lands in cooperation with the City of Loveland and First Choice Bank, purchased 145 acres to protect the unique geological landmark of the Devil's Backbone. A nature trail will be open in the Fall of 1999 for the public to enjoy.

*Total Cost: \$565,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$396,500*

**Sylvan Dale Ranch:** In partnership with the City of Loveland, GOCO and Sylvan Dale Ranch, the County purchased a conservation easement on 477 acres at the mouth of the Big Thompson Canyon. This easement will protect the scenic qualities of the canyon mouth for visitors in route to Rocky Mountain National Park. This project is also a component of the Rivers Legacy Project, designed to protect the riparian corridors of the Poudre and Big Thompson Rivers.

*Total Cost: \$446,250*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$271,250*

**Lily Lake/Roessler:** Open Lands contributed \$40,000 to fund a project headed by Rocky Mountain National Park Association to acquire 18 acres of highly visible land adjacent to the Lily Lake Visitors Center in Rocky Mountain National Park.

*Total Cost: \$400,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$40,000*

**Bickel:** \$5,000 was granted to Estes Park to fund a downtown open space/historic district acquisition. Since 1989, Estes Park has been working to protect a prominent knoll in conjunction with the Stanley Hotel Historic District. This knoll and the Bickel parcel, are central to maintaining a valued viewshed.

*Total Cost: \$135,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$5,000*

**Smitherman Ranch:** Partnering together, GOCO, the Estes Valley Land Trust (EVLTL), the Division of Wildlife, and the Open Lands Program purchased a conservation easement on 520 acres of the Smitherman Ranch south of Estes Park. This easement, held by the EVLTL, will protect an incredibly unique wetland system that provides special habitat for wildlife as well as plant communities rare to Colorado.

*Total Cost: \$520,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$130,000*

*“I can't wait to hike on the nature trails that will be constructed on the Devil's Backbone and Coyote Ridge during this summer and fall! This is what our Open Lands Program is about—allowing people to explore and enjoy Larimer County's special places in a way that also protects the resources we are preserving.”*

*Jim Disney,  
County Commissioner District 3*



*“ We are privileged to live in a county of extreme diversity and unbelievable elegance. Our Open Lands Program is funded by citizens of the County who want to preserve and maintain these qualities. The willing seller/willing buyer concept allows participants on both sides to be part of this while being fairly compensated. ”*

*Kathay Rennels,  
County Commissioner District 1*

**Horsetooth Mountain Park (Soderberg):**

Larimer County purchased the remaining 103 acres of the Soderberg Ranch, adjacent to Horsetooth Mountain Park. Acquisition of the homestead of one of the County's pioneer families will provide a unique opportunity to establish a visitor center which depicts the heritage of the area.

*Total Cost: \$460,000*

**Horsetooth Mountain Park (Hughey):**

With the help of GOCO and the generosity of the landowner, the County expanded Horsetooth Mountain Park by another 282 acres. This addition will allow for more recreational trails, provide a visual buffer from encroaching development and protect wildlife habitat.

*Total Cost: \$279,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$129,000*

**Horsetooth Reservoir Improvements**

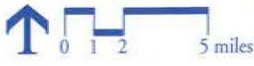
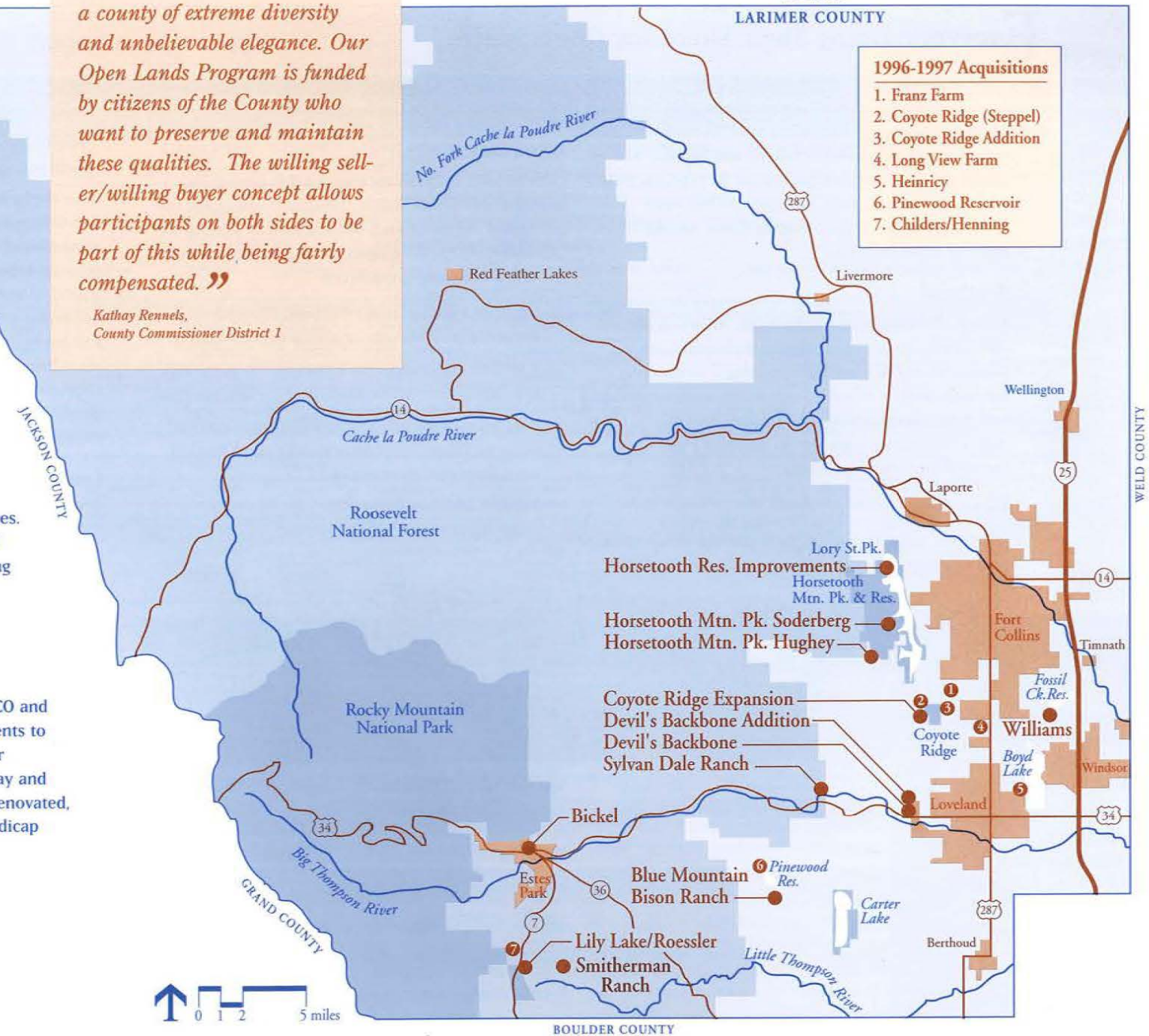
The Open Lands Program partnering with GOCO and the Bureau of Reclamation funded improvements to public recreation facilities at the ever popular Horsetooth Reservoir. Boat ramps at South Bay and Satanka Cove were expanded, campgrounds renovated, restroom facilities added, and picnic and handicap accessibility provided.

*Total Cost: \$400,000*

*Larimer County Open Lands: \$300,000*

WYOMING  
LARIMER COUNTY

- 1996-1997 Acquisitions**
1. Franz Farm
  2. Coyote Ridge (Steppel)
  3. Coyote Ridge Addition
  4. Long View Farm
  5. Heinrichy
  6. Pinewood Reservoir
  7. Childers/Henning





# Everyone Doing Their Share for Open Space

The Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax revenue is shared by Larimer County and six municipalities in the county. Revenue sharing is specified in the ballot initiative so that all county residents will benefit. Shares are distributed based on population or sales tax generation, whichever is most beneficial to that town. Each town must use its share for open space, natural areas, regional parks or trails.

## Berthoud

In 1998, Berthoud spent open space dollars to protect agricultural lands by forming the Berthoud Land Conservation Fund and implementing a landowner outreach project to assist landowners with conservation easement opportunities. In addition, Berthoud is planning a community separator to preserve open lands between Berthoud and Loveland.

## Estes Park

Estes Park used its share to purchase the Bickel property, a critical piece of open space in the heart of Estes

Park. Remaining dollars were used to fund the Willows property as well as city trails.

## Fort Collins

During 1998, Fort Collins continued to protect key natural areas, both within Fort Collins and in the surrounding region. A total of \$2,277,000 of the City's share of Help Preserve Open Space sales tax was used to complete 7 new acquisitions:

- A 17-acre addition to the McMurray Natural Area along the Poudre River in northwest Fort Collins.
- A 70-acre addition to the Kingfisher Point Natural Area along the Poudre River near Timberline Road.
- A 95-acre parcel adjacent to CSU's Environmental Learning Center and Cottonwood Hollow Natural Area along east Prospect Road.
- A 5-acre addition to the Pineridge Natural Area in the foothills west of the City.

- 50-acres of the Colina Mariposa Natural Area along Shields Street in south Fort Collins.
- Two 80-acre parcels adjacent to Coyote Ridge Natural Area in the Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor.

Since the beginning of the County's open space tax, Fort Collins has invested a total of \$5.1 million in the protection of nearly 2,200 acres of land that provides valuable habitat for native wildlife and plants as well as critical sites our citizens may use for relaxation within the urban setting. Looking forward to 1999 and beyond, Fort Collins' share of the County's sales tax will remain essential to the City's ongoing efforts to protect critical open lands in the Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor, Fossil Creek Reservoir, and along the Poudre River.

## Loveland

In 1998, the Open Lands Program concluded its Visioning Process and targeted four priorities totaling 3,200 acres to preserve as open lands surrounding the community. Loveland acquired property to buffer less desirable land uses; negotiated conservation easements to protect the Big Thompson River Corridor; and partnered with Larimer County on the Devil's Backbone and Sylvan Dale Ranch.

## Timnath

Timnath continues to save its share for future open space projects. The town hopes to participate in regional partnership programs.

## Wellington

Wellington continues to save its funds for future projects such as a new park within the town and playgrounds at existing parks.

## Help Preserve Open Spaces Tax Revenues Benefit the Entire County

Money to fund Open Lands Programs comes from a 1/4 cent sales and use tax. The tax is not imposed on food.

The tax continues through 2003, and total revenue is estimated to be more than \$59 million. Projections are based on an 8% annual growth rate in revenues. Distribution to incorporated areas is based on the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation.

Annual Revenue Projections and Distribution of Open Space Tax (in millions \$)\* 1998

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Larimer County	2.260	2.485	2.708	2.924	3.158	3.411	3.684	3.978	24.608	41%
Berthoud	0.071	0.081	0.088	0.095	0.102	0.110	0.119	0.129	0.795	1%
Estes Park	0.162	0.178	0.193	0.209	0.226	0.244	0.263	0.284	1.759	3%
Fort Collins	2.107	2.320	2.488	2.687	2.901	3.134	3.384	3.655	22.676	38%
Loveland	0.847	0.932	1.004	1.084	1.171	1.264	1.366	1.475	9.143	15%
Timnath	0.004	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.006	0.006	0.007	0.007	0.045	0%
Wellington	0.030	0.033	0.040	0.044	0.047	0.051	0.055	0.060	0.360	1%
Totals	5.481	6.034	6.526	7.048	7.611	8.220	8.878	9.588	59.386	100%

\* These figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid 1999. Figures in this chart have been rounded up when appropriate and percents are approximate.



# Inventory of Open Lands Projects (4/20/99)

Name	Acreage	Donation	Acquisition Cost	Larimer Co. Open Lands	Partnerships	Public Access	Comments
<b>Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor</b>							
Long View Farm (Ute/Snowy & One Putt)	479		2,465,000	1,232,500	Fort Collins Loveland	821,666 410,833	Yes, future trail Working agricultural operation
Long View Farm (Buckner)	120		562,000	562,000			Yes, future trail Working agricultural operation
Jensen	80		316,160	60,000	Fort Collins	256,160	No Managed by Fort Collins
Franz	160		480,000	120,000	Fort Collins Larimer County	120,000 240,000	No Managed by Fort Collins
Duck Lake (Williams)	8	19,650	136,000	136,000			Yes, future conservation park Fossil Creek Resource Management Area
<b>Front Range Mountain Backdrop</b>							
Coyote Ridge	440		924,000	100,000	Fort Collins	824,000	Yes 1999 Managed by Fort Collins
Coyote Ridge Addition	315		693,000	346,500	Fort Collins	346,500	Yes 1999 Managed by Fort Collins
Coyote Ridge (Stepple)	84	21,500	278,500	92,833	Fort Collins	185,666	Yes, 1999 Managed by Fort Collins
Coyote Ridge (Expansion)	230 (93*)		565,880	565,880			Yes, 2000
Blue Mountain Bison Ranch	4100*	666,000	2,000,000	1,350,000	GOCO	650,000	No Phase I Blue Mountain Watershed Project
Devil's Backbone Nature Trail	138		472,500	396,500	Loveland, etc.	76,000	Yes, 1999
Devil's Backbone Addition	6		92,500	92,500			Yes, 1999
Sylvan Dale Ranch	477*	148,750	446,250	271,250	Loveland GOCO	75,000 100,000	Possible future trail Preserves viewshed at mouth of Big Thompson Canyon
<b>Estes Valley</b>							
Childers/Henning	160*		48,000		Larimer County	48,000	No Managed by the Estes Valley Land Trust
Smitherman Ranch	520*		520,000	130,000	EVL GOCO	130,000 260,000	No Managed by the Estes Valley Land Trust
Bickel	1		135,000	5,000	Estes Park	130,000	Yes Adjacent to Estes Municipal Center
Lakes Estes Trail	Four miles (phase III)		232,500	100,000	4 partners	132,500	Yes Managed by Estes Valley Rec. & Park Dist.
Meadowdale/Lion Gulch Trailhead			21,521	10,000	US Forest Service	11,521	Yes Managed by US Forest Service
Lily Lake/Roessler	18		400,000	40,000	GOCO, RMPA, etc.	360,000	No Transferred to Rocky Mountain Nat'l. Park
<b>Expansions to Regional Parks</b>							
Pinewood (Ranch Enterprises)	177		325,000	325,000			Yes, 2000 Managed as part of Pinewood Reservoir
Horsetooth Mtn. Pk (Soderberg)	101		460,000	460,000			After Life Estate Future Visitor Center as well as trail access
Horsetooth Mtn. Pk. (Hughey)	282	31,000	279,000	129,000	GOCO	150,000	Yes, 2000 Managed as part of Horsetooth Mtn. Park
Heinricy	30		405,000	90,000	5 partners	315,000	Yes, trail Managed as part of Boyd Lake State Park
Easement Acreage Total	5304*						
<b>Total</b>	<b>7973</b>	<b>886,900</b>	<b>12,257,809</b>	<b>6,614,963</b>		<b>5,441,846</b>	
<b>Improvements to Existing Regional Parks</b>							
South Bay Horsetooth Res.			200,000	200,000			Yes Expansion of boat ramp
Satanka Cove Horsetooth Res.			200,000	100,000	GOCO, BOR	100,000	Yes Expansion of boat ramp, picnic facilities, handicap access
Regional Park Improvements			550,000	225,000	BOR	325,000	Yes Facility improvement projects to existing reservoirs

\* Conservation Easement Acreage

Properties managed by Larimer County Parks & Open Lands



## The Blue Mountain Watershed— An Aspiring Vision!

Nestled between the waters of Carter Lake and the mountains of Roosevelt National Forest west of Loveland and Berthoud, the Blue Mountain watershed is a large expanse of undeveloped landscape over 10,000 acres. Blue Mountain and its adjacent rolling foothills, ridgelines, and hogback valleys, is part of a natural corridor of ecological transition from mountains to plain that is rapidly disappearing because of urban Front Range development. The Blue Mountain watershed itself is under development pressure. Preservation of this area provides a unique opportunity in Larimer County to preserve a landscape and also provide highly valued passive outdoor recreation opportunities for Front Range communities.

**Wildlife habitat and ranching heritage.** An in-depth study revealed that much of the area should be protected using conservation easements due to wildlife values and landowner desires, particularly with regard to preserving the ranching heritage of the area. In 1998, the Open Lands Program began this land protection effort by acquiring a conservation easement from a willing partner on the Blue Mountain Bison Ranch, a 4100-acre ranch at the western base of Blue Mountain.



*Home, home on the range...*

**A new regional park preserve.** There is an opportunity to provide greatly needed passive outdoor recreation opportunities on 4000 acres in close proximity to Carter Lake, a popular regional park. This area has less sensitive natural resource values and offers wonderful opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, picnicking or simple relaxation in the beautiful outdoors of Larimer County. It is our goal to protect the majority of the Blue Mountain watershed using conservation easements while acquiring 4000 acres adjacent to Carter Lake as a regional park preserve for public enjoyment.

## Open Space Tax also Provides for Small-scale Community Projects

The Small Grants Program was initiated by the Open Lands Advisory Board to encourage grassroots projects of a smaller scope and scale, but of equal importance to those considered by the Open Lands Program. This program is designed to provide funding to small-scale projects which emphasize open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails. Each year, at least 5 grants of up to \$2,000 are awarded.

Basically projects need to provide or enhance natural areas, including wildlife habitat, riparian areas or wetlands; provide links with existing open lands; or afford opportunities for environmental education and/or outdoor recreation.

Coming from all over Larimer County, diverse groups such as elementary schools, youth groups and homeowner associations as well as an abbey have been successful in receiving grants. Projects have ranged from streambank revegetation, protecting endangered mouse habitat to building outdoor classroom facilities. Larimer County is proud of this program and looks forward to funding many more creative ideas. For more information, contact the Parks and Open Lands Department at 679-4577, or see our website.



**Parks & Open Lands Department**  
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