GOCO to fund new trails

$550,000 will go toward Soapstone, Red Mountain

BY KEVIN DUGGAN

Great Outdoors Colorado has awarded a $550,000 grant to build trail systems at Red Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.

The grant was given to Larimer County, which owns Red Mountain Open Space, and the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, which administers Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. The money will help build 42 miles of trail and three trailheads on the scenic properties near the Wyoming border.

The funding also will help the county pay for fencing that will protect sensitive riparian areas from grazing cattle and a display wall that illustrates the area's cultural heritage, said Megan Flomkin, resource specialist with Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

Red Mountain and Soapstone are scheduled to open for public use in June. The connecting trail systems will provide access to more than 27,000 acres.

Construction on roads leading to the area and parking facilities has been going on for about a year, said Mark Sears, program manager for the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program.

The county will receive $338,000 through the grant; Fort Collins will receive $210,000. The remaining $2,000 will go to the Larimer County Youth Corps.

Portions of the trail systems on both properties are already under construction, Sears said. When complete, Soapstone will have about 40 miles of trail, and Red Mountain, about 14 miles.

The trails are expected to draw hikers from along the Front Range, Sears said.

Great Outdoors Colorado, or GOCO, is funded by state lottery proceeds. Since 1994, Larimer County has received more than $30.7 million in GOCO grants.

In 2004, GOCO contributed an $11.6 million grant toward the Laramie Foothills: Mountains to Plains project, which would recreate a 140,000-acre conservation area north of Fort Collins.

"They have been very instrumental in helping us open these properties to the public," Sears said.
Vibrant yellows and greens mix with reds and browns at Hermit Park.
The vibrant gold and red leaves make the aspen trees look more alive than their true signal of impending dormancy.

Throughout the ups and downs of the hike to Homestead Meadows — not difficult but more challenging than its "easy" rating — the fall hues are striking against green pine needles.

About 2.5 miles from the parking lot at Hermit Park, a new public recreation area just outside Estes Park, the first historic homestead awaits — one of seven built in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

The Homestead Meadows trail, which winds through about 12 miles of the Roosevelt National Forest, is accessible from Hermit Park, an oasis of beauty, wildlife and history.

Hiking a few miles beyond the first homestead will delight the eyes with more colors and more old cabins.

From the car on the road through Hermit Park, an old cabin hints at another history.

Named after an old hermit who squatted on the land when it was a cattle ranch and who was eventually hanged because of his hankering for beef, the cabin is the oldest in the new Larimer County park.

The county bought the 1,362 acres from Hewlett-Packard, who owned it for decades as a personal playground for its employees.

Earlier this year, Hermit Park opened to residents who want to camp, rent cabins or hold large celebrations.

And for those who simply want to spend the day, two trails start in the park.

The Homestead Meadows trail is about 1.5 miles within Hermit Park then continues on national forest land. To a beginner, the inclines seem tougher than they look, but spectacular views and colors are the rewards.

Also starting in the park is the Kruger Rock trail, which is 2.75 miles round trip accessible only to those on foot. No bikes, horses or vehicles allowed.

The view from either trail inside Hermit Park, breathtaking at any time of the year, is particularly striking now, amid the fall colors.

**Upcoming hikes**

- "Views from Kruger Rock," a 2.75-mile hike with naturalists 9 a.m. Saturday starting from the pavilion area at Hermit Park Open Space. Participants must pay $6 park entrance fee per vehicle. Hike is three hours, rated moderate.

- "Hikes to the Homesteads" with a naturalist 9 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 18, at the Homestead Meadows parking lot inside Hermit Park Open Space. The hike is free but participants must pay the $6 entrance fee per vehicle. Hike is five miles and lasts five hours, rated easy to moderate.

Homestead Meadows is named after the seven cabins you can see along the hike.
Chimney Hollow Reservoir disputed

Western Slope residents speak out at hearing

BY PAMELA DICKMAN
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Representatives of some of the cities that will benefit from Chimney Hollow Reservoir spoke Tuesday of the need to store water for future growth on this side of the Continental Divide.

However, people who live on the other side of the Divide worry that the proposal to send water from the Windy Gap Project through the Colorado-Big Thompson pipeline will hurt tourism and water quality — the backbone of the Grand County economy.

"One area of the state should not grow at the expense of others," attorney Gina Harden said at a public hearing on the proposed reservoir Tuesday. Several Western Slope residents trod over the Continental Divide to talk at a hearing in Loveland about their worries if Northern Water is allowed to proceed.

Flatiron Reservoir can be seen at left Wednesday near the site of the proposed Chimney Hollow Reservoir northwest of Carter Lake.
What to know

What: Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water) wants to build Chimney Hollow Reservoir near Carter Lake to store 90,000 acre-feet of water from the Windy Gap project.

Where: The water belongs to: Loveland, Greeley, LaSalle, Fort Lupton, Evans, Eng, Boulder, Longmont, Louisville, Superior, Central Weld Water District, Little Thompson Water District, and Poudre River Power Authority.

Cost: $22.9 million, shared by the participants. Loveland’s share is estimated at $21 million, or 53% per acre-foot. The money is currently available in the city’s new water fund, which comes from development fees, rates, and other sources.

Where: The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation should decide by spring 2009 whether to issue a permit, and construction could begin in 2011.

How to comment: Comments are due Oct. 28 to Will Tully, Bureau of Reclamation: 11056 W. County Road 18E, Loveland, CO 80537; 663-2212 (fax), or online @gov.love.org (look “Windy Gap draft EIS comment” in the e-mail subject line). A public meeting is scheduled for 7 tonight at the Inn at Silver Creek, 62027 U.S. 40, Loveland.

For more information, go to www.chimneyhollow.org or www.usbr.gov/gp/eplc.

Environmental impacts

The draft environmental impact statement for Chimney Hollow Reservoir outlines the following potential effects:

- Water flows in the Colorado River would decrease with or without the reservoir, although the decrease would double with the reservoir.
- Flows in the Big Thompson River would increase about 4 percent.
- Water levels would decrease about 1 foot in Carter Lake and 2-6 feet in Horsetooth Reservoir. This is not likely to impact fish populations.
- Water temperatures and levels of phosphorus would increase slightly in the Colorado River and Horsetooth Reservoir.
- The habitat for adult rainbow trout could decrease 25 percent in the Colorado River upstream of Williams Fork four out of 10 years. However, if the reservoir is approved, Northern Water would work with the Division of Wildlife to implement ways to mitigate that.
- The project will not impact spring spawning of rainbow trout or fall spawning of brown trout.
- Chimney Hollow would provide a new recreation asset in Larimer County, providing hiking on adjacent open space, nonmotorized boating and fishing. An estimated 50,000 annual visitors would increase traffic.
- Construction of the reservoir also would increase traffic on County Road 18E and County Road 31. However, it also would add jobs and construction-related spending.
- During worst-case-scenario years, the project could cost $350,000 to commercial rafting and kayaking in Big Gorge Canyon and Pumphouse.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation draft environmental impact statement.
Glade Reservoir
our best option
for future water

It will take some mitigation, but a Glade Reservoir is the
dearest, least costly and environmentally sound alternative to
meet current and future needs of important communities in
Northern Colorado.

The Glade Reservoir should be built as the best alternative
of the Northern Integrated
Supply Project. It involves the storage and beneficial use of
water that otherwise flows down the Platte River out of Colorado
and ultimately into the Gulf of
Mexico. This is waste of one of the earth's important environmental
resources. This is water
that this semi-arid area cannot
afford to fritter away.

Glade is designed to provide
annually about 80,000 acre
feet of water for direct use by the par-
ticipants that otherwise is lost
downstream. The capturing of
this water in the upper basin also
has a multiplying effect because
after the use of water by the par-
ticipants, a substantial portion of
it will be returned to the water
system for reuse further down-
stream. This helps both the
downstream underground and
river water users in Colorado.

The need for the water is
clearly established in the draft
Environmental Impact
Statement. The Glade Reservoir
option is more cost-effective and environmentally sound than the
"no action" option.

It is argued by some of the
project opponents that providing
this extra water will just encourage development. But it
is clear that development has,
and will take place. This is a
country, and people want to
live in one of the most desirable
places. This is one of them, and
water will be available.

The Corps estimates that up
to 69,000 acres would be lost to
irrigated agriculture to meet
this need in the "no action"
option. This would be in addition
to nearly half of the agricul-
ture acreage already lost from
the loss of water to municipali-
ties. This would be land convert-
ed from irrigated crop land to
dry land. Such conversion to dry
land not only hurts the economy
but can and does lead to more scattered development, unsightly
viewscapes and even dirt-
blowing undesirable lands.

Don't doubt that his farm land
loss will occur with the "no-
action" alternative.

Many of the opponents of
Glade are those that blocked the
use of remaining unappropriated
water on the South Platte River
system for the proposed Grey
Mountain Reservoir on the main
stem of the Poudre River. The
clear objection then was that
because it was in the canyon on
the main stem of the river, it
would degrade the beautiful
canyon. The Glade alternative
removes the water storage from
the Poudre Canyon and puts it
where there is minimal aesthetic
and environmental impact.

Many of those opposing were
members of a highly organized
group to "save our Poudre" with
the emphasis on "our." But the
Poudre basin and river belong
to us all.

In addition to the current
multiple use of the Poudre River
there is, with good planning,
room for the additional multiple
uses that include a Glade
Reservoir for stored water and a
wonderful recreation reservoir.

An online commenter,
Dannachair in the Sept. 6
Coloradoan, put it very well:
pointing out that we tend to be
a selfish society: what's mine
is mine and yours is mine, too.
Dana choices ended with "thank
you forefathers for your building
the current reservoirs."

Low Grant lives in Wellington.
Devil's Backbone a top spot

BY MILES BLUMHARDT
For Loveland Connection

Fins of defiant sandstone resembling protective scales on a stegosaurus’ back march along the hog-back, ready to bathe in the first rays of the day. Junco flit from spent yucca tops to boulders. Spotted towhees call from mountain mahogany. Wands of purple liatris and tufts of golden-yellow rabbitbrush wait for the sun to awaken their sleeping beauty.

And then the sun peeks over the eastern hills, spilling first on the fins, coloring them a buttery yellow-gold, then the wildflowers, shrubs and grasses, until the Devil's Backbone Open Space is fully clothed in the day's best light attire.

Already, there are people running and hiking the rocky-colored trails that offer stunning vistas, a testament to the popularity of this 2,198-acre Larimer County Natural Resources-managed property west of Loveland.

Of all the county's open spaces, Devil’s Backbone is hard to beat when taking everything into consideration.

Basically, Loveland residents feel about the Devil's Backbone like Fort Collins residents feel about Horsetooth Rock. Consider:

• It's true, whether at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, you have to pay.
• The rock formations are every bit as beautiful, if not more so, than Horsetooth Rock, and for those who like less work, kiosks and 7 miles of trails with varying difficulty in the original portion of the property with an additional 10 miles of trails that stretch to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Look for the adult prairie falcons that have made the backbone their home, as well as other raptors and ravens.

• Where: Take U.S. Highway 34 west in Loveland to Hidden Valley Drive (old water tank west of Loveland). Go right. The trailhead is in the northeast part of the parking lot.

• Hours: Sunrise to sunset

• Cost: Free

• What's there: The Luke Altmix Simmons’ outdoor classroom recently opened, parking lot with horse trailer parking, restrooms, drinking fountains
Devil’s
Continued from Page 16

• The view from the Keyhole to the layered mountains to the west and Front Range to the east are as stunning a view as you’ll find.

• Wildlife is plentiful with deer, raptors, rabbits, coyotes, bobcats and black bears (one was seen at the trailhead Aug. 21) are present in widely varying numbers.

Though as I found out on my recent trip to video the open space, taking a camera can sometimes jinx the wildlife viewing.

• And the trails, well, there is everything from easy hiking loops that take you to near the base of the rock formations to spacious horseback trails that wind through remote dry washes to technically challenging mountain bik-

ing. These combined total 17.5 miles and connect the city of Fort Collins-managed Coyote Ridge, Natural Area and Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

Plus, in sections, the trails separate hikers, bikers and horseback riders to alleviate conflict. I like to take my bike and hiking boots.

That way I can enjoy the foot-only trail section that takes you closest to the rock formations where raptors and ravens nest and perch. Once I do that loop, I hop on my mountain bike and ride the more secluded Hunter and Laughing Horse loops. From here, you can access the beautiful Blue Sky Trail and ride all the way to Horsetooth.

There are two excellent times of the year to enjoy Devil’s Backbone - May through mid-June and September and October. These times reward the user with pleasant temperatures, wildflowers and migrating raptors.

Log On
See the most up-to-date news at LovelandConnection.com.

steep, rocky descent on the Hunter Loop trail. I picked myself up, wiped myself off and staggered to a high spot to check out the possible damages to bike and body.

Two deer, backlit by the early morning sun, browsed on mountain mahogany along a distant ridge.

The sandstone fins marched across the hogback spine in the forefront with layers of lazy mountains in between and Longs Peak and Mount Meeker serving as the backdrop.

Two insects were mating on a layer of bright yellow sunflower blooms.

I was alright. No, I was more than alright.
Poll shows strong support for Glade

BY KEVIN DUGGAN
kevin.duggan@coloradoglobe.com

BERTHOUD — Glade Reservoir and the Northern Integrated Supply Project has widespread support among Larimer County and Fort Collins residents, according to survey results released Friday.

The survey found 67 percent of responding Fort Collins residents support the project, as do 63 percent of Larimer County residents.

Thirty percent of Fort Collins residents oppose NISP, primarily because they believe it would harm the Poudre River, according to the survey.

In Weld County, 81 percent of respondents support NISP, which would draw water from the Poudre River and store it in the proposed Glade Reservoir north of Ted's Place.

The project also would draw water from the South Platte River for storage in Galeton Reservoir, which would be built near Greeley, to be exchanged with irrigation companies.

Most of the 15 municipalities and water districts that would fund NISP through the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District are in Weld County.

NISP participants funded the $35,000 survey, which was conducted by Denver-based polling firm

See GLADE/Page A2
By the numbers
NISP and Glade Reservoir:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Larimer</th>
<th>Weld</th>
<th>Fort Collins</th>
<th>Greeley</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Favor</td>
<td>63 percent</td>
<td>81 percent</td>
<td>57 percent</td>
<td>83 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>24 percent</td>
<td>8 percent</td>
<td>30 percent</td>
<td>8 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/neutral</td>
<td>13 percent</td>
<td>11 percent</td>
<td>13 percent</td>
<td>9 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why in favor (multiple answers):

- Need the water: 43 percent
- Nued storage: 36 percent
- Area growing: 14 percent
- Good project: 5 percent
- Protect agriculture: 2 percent

Why oppose (multiple answers):

- Dry up or hurt the river: 44 percent
- Hurts the environment: 13 percent
- Unnecessary: 11 percent
- Inadequate plan: 10 percent
- Will encourage growth: 6 percent
- Stop building reservoirs: 5 percent

For complete results of the survey by Ciruli Associates, see www.gladereservoir.org

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Glade
Continued from Page A1

Ciruli Associates, Northern Water spokesman Brian Werner said.

The random survey of 500 registered voters in Larimer County and 300 in Weld County was conducted in early August.

The Larimer County results have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points, pollster Floyd Ciruli said. The margin of error for the smaller Weld County sample is 5.7 percentage points.

The survey shows "overwhelming" support for the project, Ciruli told the Northern Water board of directors Friday.

If the survey were connected to an election issue, Ciruli said, he would expect a landslide victory at the polls.

Gary Wockner, spokesman for the anti-Glade group Save the Poudre Coalition, declined to comment on the survey until he and others review the full survey and the results.

Northern Water officials said they were pleased and somewhat surprised by the results.

"If you listen to a lot of the more (vocal) opinions out there, you would think the results would have been the opposite of what they came out to be," said Eric Wilkinson, general manager.

The survey also showed strong support in both counties for protecting agriculture and regional cooperation on water projects.

Ciruli told reporters survey respondents were aware and informed about Glade and NISP. More than 50 percent of respondents in Larimer County said they had heard a great deal to some information about the project.

The vocal opposition has affected public opinion in Fort Collins, he said, as is evidenced in the difference between results for the city and Larimer County.

"There's one solid quarter of the public... that are absolutely opposed in Larimer County," he said. "They show up in each question. And they correspond to the environmental activist community."
Glade foes rip survey

Save the Poudre Coalition calls new NISP data ‘a biased push poll’

BY KEVIN DUGGAN
kevinduggan@coloradoan.com

Opponents of Glade Reservoir on Monday ripped a recent survey that indicated broad public support for the reservoir and the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project.

The survey, which was financed by the 15 regional municipalities and water districts that would build NISP through the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, was “a biased push poll” intended to manipulate respondents, said Gary Wockner, spokesman for the Save the Poudre Coalition.

Wockner said the poll is “filled with false and grossly misleading information” and fails to mention environmental and economic problems that could be brought on by the project, which would draw water from the Poudre River and store it in Glade Reservoir north of Ted’s Place.

See SURVEY/Page A2

Jamie Jasinski, left, and Scott Lyon stand in the Poudre River in their river recreation outfits in April.

Glade Opponents blast NISP survey

"From now on, there was no mention of the costs of the project. Fort Collins residents who were allaying the fear of a flood to which they might never be subject now are realizing there could be any number of flood-related costs."
Survey
Continued from Page A1

"It's like telling people about the benefits of nuclear power but not telling them uranium causes cancer," he said. "The push polls is a complete sham." 

The survey was done by Denver-based Cirulli Associates headed by Floyd Cirulli, who has more than 30 years experience in public-opinion research. The results were released Friday during a presentation to the Northern Water board of directors.

Cirulli said Monday he followed standard methodologies and techniques in crafting the survey's questions and in interviewing respondents. The survey showed 82 percent of respondents from Larimer County were aware of NISP, he said.

A key survey question on NISP was preceded by background information gleaned from media reports on the project and the draft Environmental Impact Statement on NISP, he said. The information was intended to be as neutral as possible.

Responses to follow-up statements, to which respondents could agree or disagree, showed strong support for increased water storage and keeping water available for agriculture, he said. The answers were consistent, Cirulli said.

"I think if you look at the data, you'll find the people of Weld and Larimer counties are exceptionally well informed on water issues," he said.

The survey found 63 percent of responding Larimer County residents and 57 percent of Fort Collins residents favor the project. In Weld County, 81 percent of those surveyed support NISP.

Weckner dismissed the results as skewed because of the questions and how they were presented.

The random survey of 500 registered voters in Larimer County and 300 in Weld County was conducted in early August.

The Larimer County results have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points, while the margin of error for the smaller Weld County sample is 5.7 percentage points.
County officials want
to protect open spaces

BY KATHRYN DAILEY
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

FORT COLLINS — Officials plan to keep a close eye on mineral rights purchase and leasing opportunities for the county's open spaces, hoping to protect them from mining or drilling.

After a request earlier this year by County Commissioner Randy Eubanks, staff members from the Natural Resources Department presented the commissioners with a list Tuesday of all the open space properties and conservation easements that the county holds but for which it isn't sole owner of the mineral rights.

Staffers did not identify any properties they believe are at risk.

"I'm going to feel a lot more comfortable knowing where we sit on this," Eubanks said.

If the county owns a piece of land but someone else owns the rights to the underground resources, such as gas or oil, then that person or entity has the right to extract them.

Although there were no properties identified as being at risk, the county should update the assessments on the likelihood of the minerals being developed, which can change as the economic climate changes, said K-Lynn Cameron, the county's open lands manager.

Land agent Charlie Johnson said those assessments cost between $3,000 and $5,000.

Another option is to look at purchasing the severed mineral rights to the properties that county officials feel may be at risk in the future, Johnson said.

For pieces of land where the rights are owned by the federal government or railroads, Johnson said, the county should consider leasing them if they become available.

"They're not going to give up their rights," he said.

Commissioner Kay Sleeper suggested that annual updates of the status of the properties be made.

"I think this is a really good framework we've established," Cameron said, adding that now it will be easy to update and monitor the properties.
County officials say open lands not threatened by mining

BY KEVIN DUGGAN
KevinDuggan.com

Increased oil and gas activity in the region is not likely to pose a threat to Larimer County open lands on which the county does not own the mineral rights, officials said Tuesday.

Exploration has picked up in Weld County with the surge in oil prices and could move into the southeast part of the Larimer County and spread north, Charlie Johnson, an engineer with the county’s Department of Natural Resources, told the county commissioners.

But Johnson said he sees no “imminent threat” to land owned outright by the county or property covered by county-purchased conservation easements because of their locations.

Oil, gas and other minerals may be beneath the surface of county-owned lands, but the cost of retrieving them may be too high to make extraction economically feasible, he said.

If oil drilling were to come, the disruption would be short-lived, Johnson said in an interview following the commissioners’ meeting.

“Oil and gas extraction is not as bad as an open-pit mine,” he said. “It’s temporary. It’s kind of ugly when it’s going on and you do have some infrastructure after it’s done but it’s not that bad.”

Commissioner Randy Fuentes raised the issue of whether county lands may be vulnerable to mining given the spike in prices for uranium as well as oil and gas.

After reviewing property records, Johnson found mineral rights on several open-lands property were wholly or partially owned by entities such as the Union Pacific Land Resources Corp. and the US government.

Other rights appear to be owned by private parties, such as family members of former property owners.

Officials will continue reviewing property maps to see if development is occurring near county-owned properties, said K-Lynn Cameron, manager of the open lands program.
Options highlight environmental justice

George N. Wallace, Soapbox

revealed that the Glade project would induce a host of impacts: reduced flows, diminished water quality, increased water treatment costs, weakened riparian ecosystem functioning, diminished value of open space along the Poudre, years of construction associated impacts such as loss of dwindling aggregate resources, highway relocation, loss of the unique tumble-down rimrock landscape in Hook and Moore Glade, impacts to North Poudre irrigators, etc.

Locals are asked to bear such impacts to supply water to small towns, bedroom communities, special districts and Denver suburbs. Many of the NISP partners are havens to developers (many out-of-state corporations) precisely because planning has been scarce, regulations more permissive and unbridled annexations have been approved by those promising future jobs and tax revenues.

Though we here have worked in an open democratic process to build consensus and adopt master plans and land protection programs, we now find ourselves faced with an enormous project where offering comments to the Corps is our sole access to the decision process short of litigation. Our elected officials can comment but not determine the outcome. Because planning for NISP was never an inclusive or participatory regional process, this is a socio-economic or social justice issue overlooked by the draft EIS and is likely sufficient grounds for litigation.

Is this a new form of " takings"? Must it be that each time smaller rural communities wish to grow, other established communities must sacrifice their resources and hard-won quality of life? One of the goals of NEPA is "to balance population growth and resource use." As currently conceived, Glade Reservoir seems out of balance. It is at once highly consumptive of resources in the project area and an engine for population growth largely outside the project area.

Alternatives to Glade have recently been proposed that would use fewer resources and produce fewer impacts in the communities not participating in NISP. Such alternatives would foster environmental justice, provide tangible benefits to agriculture (water sharing agreements) while allowing some continued growth. A revised EIS should give these alternatives the attention they are due.

George N. Wallace lives in Weyerhauser, two miles east of the proposed Glade Reservoir site.
Now's a great time to visit local landmark

**Horsetooth Mountain Open Space**

- **Address:** 5600 E. County Road 4
- **Facilities:** Restrooms, water, information tent, picnic tables
- **Pets:** Leashed
- **Camping:** Backcountry camping is allowed for free, but you must register with park staff to get a permit.
- **Fees:** $5 for a day pass

Horsetooth Falls hiking or mountain biking the more than 50 miles of trails, which connect to Loy Lake Park and the Blue Sky Trail, wildlife watching and wildflowers and fall foliage peeping.

Larimer County open space, which draws more than 100,000 people annually. The waning wildflower show and blooming shrubs, hints of fall on the foliage and temperature and the lack of summer crowds are all more reliant reasons to visit the 2,856-acre open space this time of year.

The only thing that could make my early morning hike to the top of 7,256-foot Horsetooth Rock any more pleasing would be seeing a bear, which has been seen by visitors in recent weeks.

With only two cars in the parking lot at just past sunrise, solitude was not an issue. I hiked the 2.5-mile Horsetooth Rock Trail, stopping frequently to watch butterflies and other insects drinking in the last port of the season from bright golden rabbitbrush, which steals the color show in full.

Subtle shows of color from lavender asters, purple penstemon, magenta cranesbill, blue harebells and yellow sunflowers still dot the hillsides and blend with a confusion of orange, red and yellow hues from American mums.
Rock

Continued from Page E1

have is of the rock itself. It doesn't expose itself until about three-quarters of the way up. Then, after a bend where the Horsetooth Rock and South Ridge trails intersect, the tooth-like formation juts up into the blue sky, framed by pine boughs.

From here, it's a short hike, shorter scramble up the northern flank of the formation and you're on top of the landmark.

The views from the top are easily worth the effort. To the east are a gleaming Horsetooth Reservoir and Fort Collins. To the south, Loveland, and if you're lucky, Pikes Peak. To the west, distant views of Longs Peak and below your feet beautiful Redstone Canyon. To the north, Greyrock and the Wyoming border.

You can't reach the middle tooth from either direction, as cute in the rock prevent it.

Instead of returning to the parking lot via the Horsetooth Rock Trail, descend on the Audra Culver Trail, which after a mile hooks up to the South Ridge Trail. The Audra Culver Trail is much less traveled and offers spectacular views south to Milner Mountain.

Hiking down the Audra Culver Trail, I had visions of seeing that bear putting on hibernation weight by feasting on the last of the chokecherries and wild

Ridge Trail. A black form of a red fox hunts for rodents along the service road at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space on Tuesday. The fox has been a highlight of visitors to the property this year.
Preserving the 'giant' icon that is Horsetooth Rock

All you need to do is look west towards the foothills from almost any location in eastern Larimer County and you will most likely see one of Northern Colorado's most popular icons.

That familiar landmark is Horsetooth Rock and the 95,000 people annually who hike to its peak are rewarded with impressive views across the Eastern Plains. From the summit, you can see landmarks such as Pikes Peak, Indian Peaks, Mount Meeker and Longs Peak.

Horsetooth Rock is an icon and commonly used in logos for governmental organizations and private groups in this area.

As far back as 10,000 B.C., the Horsetooth Rock area was used by American Indians as a hunting and gathering ground. According to American Indian legend, Horsetooth Rock represents the body of a giant who was slain with a slash of his heart by a brave warrior. The death of the giant is said to have brought peace and tranquility to the valley known today as Spring Canyon.

Fur trappers and traders began to move into the area as early as 1825. Settlers soon followed with the discovery of nearby gold in 1858. By the 1870s, Horsetooth Rock became a popular place to recreate. In the 1880s, sandstone quarrying in Spring Canyon created a demand for lumber, which was harvested from the mountain slopes. Over time, regular land use practices on the mountain and surrounding land included cattle grazing, timber harvesting, quarrying and farming. By 1952, the Soderberg family owned the majority of what is now Horsetooth Mountain Open Space.

In the early 1980s, Horsetooth Rock came under the threat of impending residential development. In response, two Colorado State University students began a petition to purchase the Soderberg Ranch for a county park. Funding would be provided by extending an existing one-cent sales tax for six months. The issue, placed on the April 25, 1981 ballot, passed and by 1982, Larimer County became the owner.

Horsetooth Mountain Park was established in 1982 as a regional park. Since then, Help Preserve Open Space sales tax dollars have been used to purchase an additional 680 acres to provide ecological buffers, more trails and protect the original Soderberg Ranch buildings.

Now, Horsetooth Mountain Park has become known as Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, reflecting the use of open space dollars to cover annual management costs above those raised in user fees. Your Help Preserve Open Space tax dollars have protected more than 40,000 acres in Larimer County.

Mark Caughlan
Open spaces

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More than Meets the Eye
At Eagle’s Nest Open Space

At first glance, the rolling hills and sea of grass and shrubs at Eagle’s Nest Open Space may not reveal much variety. Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Ranger Fraser MacDonald wants to help people see there is more than meets the eye in the diverse ecosystem of the short grass prairie.

MacDonald led a plant walk on Saturday at the open space to acquaint visitors with the many native and non-native plants, shrubs and grasses that inhabit this 750-acre site. “I thought this would be a nice way to get people engaged,” said MacDonald, who often sees only 15-20 people at Eagle’s Nest on weekends.

He drew attention to the scenery, noting that mountain mahogany shrubs dominate the undisturbed slopes, while a multitude of grasses and forbs fill in the lower areas.

Eagle’s Nest reflects some of its western ranching roots with trails named after old cattle brands, and keeps cattle grazing on the property through a lease with the neighboring ranch.

As the group of visitors walked the 3-Bar trail, one of the beautiful fall bloomers that first caught everyone’s eye was gayfeather, decorating the landscape with its thin purple feathery petals. Snakeweed, sedge, prairie baby’s breath and prickly poppy were a few of the other native bloomers spotted.

MacDonald pointed out the spiral seed of the mountain mahogany, designed to wind itself into the soil. Mule deer like to browse the mahogany, along with skunkbrush and rabbitbrush. According to MacDonald, rabbitbrush was pressed and used to make latex during World War II, and skunkbrush was used by Native Americans in food, beverages, and medicines.

The grasses are a more difficult and intimidating category for those trying to learn the various species. The variety of grasses at Eagle’s Nest gave MacDonald an opportunity to point out the distinctive characteristics of needle and thread grass, green needle grass, blue grama, western wheatgrass, junegrass, and the invasive and non-native cheatgrass.

While some non-native plants, like dalmation toadflax, were probably introduced for their attractive flowers, MacDonald explained they tend to spread easily, dominating areas where native plants formerly grew. He added that Larimer County is currently working on developing a beetle that will feed on this “scary invader.” Other problem non-natives include mullen, gumweed, blue mustard, Jim Hill mustard, smooth brome, Russian thistle (tumbleweed), and leafy spurge.

Where you find plants, shrubs and grasses, you also find wildlife of all sizes. As the group examined a few of the grass species, a pair of large grasshoppers met near the path, and several different beetle species traveled the trail and dug into the soil. Nearby, Eagle’s Nest Rock has been a golden eagle nesting site for over 100 years. In late spring and early summer, visitors can view the nest through scopes provided along the trail. Mountain lions, bears, coyotes, deer, elk, rabbits, rattlesnakes and hawks are a few of the larger residents of this beautiful prairie.

When taking in the larger view of the beauty and solitude that Eagle’s Nest offers, don’t forget to examine the soil at your feet—there’s diversity among the rocks and on the hillsides that shouldn’t be missed.

Larimer County Ranger Fraser MacDonald educates visitors about native and non-native plants at Eagle’s Nest Open Space.

Eagle’s Nest Open Space is managed by Larimer County Parks and Open Lands, and opened to the public in 2005. To reach the site, go north of Fort Collins on Highway 287, 10 miles past the cutoff for the Poudre Canyon (Highway 14). Turn west on 74E (at Livermore) and go about 1/3 mile. The entrance to the site is on the south side of the road. Open sunrise to sunset, dogs allowed on leashes, horse trailer parking available. For more information, visit the Web site at www.larimer.org/naturalresources.
INTO THE WILD

Nathan Hughes, left, watches as his mother, Kathy Hartman, center, helps Carin Avila, director of education with the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program, release an American kestrel back into the wild. The trio took part in Saturday’s Northern Colorado Birding Fair at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space.

Bird watchers flock together
Fair offers viewing, presentations, release of animals

BY NATE TAYLOR
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It was Cole Wild and Andrew Spencer’s first time at the Northern Colorado Birding Fair on Saturday at Fossil Creek Reservoir, but they fit right in with other birders who celebrated the hobby and wildlife at the fair.

Birders, including veterans and novices, spent Saturday morning bird watching, taking in bird presentations and watching a raptor and duck released into the wild.

The fair was the fourth annual and attracted hundreds to Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space, about a mile west of the Interstate 25 and Colorado Highway 392 interchange.

Wild, 24, of Loveland and Spencer, 25, of Fort Collins say they are younger than your typical avid bird watcher, but they have traveled the world to go birding. Despite traveling to places such as the Amazon rainforest and the Andes Mountains, the two birders still have an appreciation for the birds found at Fossil Creek.

“This is the most biodiverse I’ve seen in one place in Fort Collins,” said Spencer, a CU junior studying wildlife biology. “This is a good location because it’s the best birding spot around for waterfowl.”

Wild said he got hooked on birding after learning what a few birds looked like in a high school class and then going fishing and putting his new knowledge to good use. He and Spencer said they would like to see more young birders and more classes about it in schools.

Saturday’s birding fair, which was aimed at families, included a bird Olympics and scavenger hunt.

Pat Gifford holds a bald eagle at the Northern Colorado Birding Fair at Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space.

Liz Pruessner of Fort Collins, a birder for the past two years, said she was excited to see so many children enjoying the fair.

“This is just a great chance to take the kids out and have them start a bird list,” Pruessner said.