

## Larimer County to end open space passport program

**Reporter-Herald Staff**

Loveland Reporter-Herald

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Larimer County's open spaces passport program will end later this fall after three years of helping connect people to Larimer County's open spaces.

A press release announced that completed passports are due by Dec. 1.

"It's been incredibly fun and rewarding hearing how people have used the passport as a guide to get outdoors and explore their open spaces," Teddy Parker-Renga, community relations specialist with the Department of Natural Resources, said in the release. "We've seen a steady decline in returned passports since the first year the program was launched, in 2016, so we want to encourage people to get theirs done."

The department placed posts on eight Larimer County open spaces, with two posts at each open space to mark an easy (short hike) and hard (long hike).

Each post has a plaque affixed to it with a unique image, so people can place their passport over the plaque and make a rubbing of the image to "stamp" their passport.

Those who collect enough rubbings can win prizes.

Parker-Renga, who manages the open spaces passport program, said a grand prize drawing will be held after the Dec. 1 deadline.

Prizes for this year's drawing include a day hiking prize pack (with an REI backpack, headlamp and more), two nights in a cabin at Hermit Park Open Space and annual entrance permits to Larimer County's parks and open spaces, plus more.

To enter the grand prize drawing, participants need to collect all 16 rubbings by Dec. 1. But those who collect eight rubbings are eligible for other prizes and those who collect 12 can get a special passport T-shirt.

"We encourage you to submit your passport, regardless of how many rubbings you've collected," Parker-Renga said. "The weather will cool down in the fall and the hiking will be spectacular in Larimer County, so get out there and collect what you can."

Participants can drop off their completed passport at the Larimer County Natural Resources Administrative Offices, 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland; the Horsetooth Area Information Center, 4200 W. County Road 38 E, Fort Collins; Hermit Park Office, Hermit Park Open Space, 17 Hermit Park Road, Estes Park; or the Citizen Information Center, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins.

Passports may also be mailed to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' offices at 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland, CO 80537.

Parker-Renga said the passport posts will be removed shortly after the Dec. 1 deadline.

For people wanting to participate this fall, a limited number of passports may still be available at select kiosks at Larimer County open space trailheads, or by calling 619-4561.

"It's not too late to start an open spaces passport, but you better hurry," said Parker-Renga, who added the department may revamp the passport program in future years. "It's been a successful program, with many families, friends and intrepid individuals discovering new places in Larimer County. We may revisit the concept, but for now, we want to go out on a high note for this version of the program."

For details, call Parker-Renga at 619-4561 or visit [larimer.org/passport](http://larimer.org/passport).

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## Editorial: Dedicate more tax money to open space operations

Posted:Sun Oct 07 00:44:38 MDT 2018

For nearly 20 years, Larimer County has been using sales tax money and Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and open to the public some of the area's most scenic places.

But though public funds purchased those lands the county is finding it hard to keep up with the costs of managing them.

Now, the county is considering instituting a \$9 per vehicle fee at Devil's Backbone Open Space west of Loveland, currently open for free. The proposal also calls for raising fees at other county areas where fees already are in place.

At a sparsely attended hearing Sept. 27, county officials said it costs \$562,000 per year to manage Devil's Backbone. The new fee is projected to raise \$500,000 a year. In all, they expected another \$1.6 million from the other fee increases proposed.

Before the proposed fee increases get final approval in December, residents have additional chances to give their input. The information will be presented in a work session before the county commissioners at 10 a.m. Monday and to the Larimer County Parks Advisory Board at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at 1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland. Then commissioners will hold a public hearing, likely in late November or early December, before making a decision by the end of 2018.

At the parks and open spaces where fees are now charged, the \$6 or \$7 entry costs will rise to \$9, significant but not overwhelmingly more. But there has never been a fee charged at the Backbone, so the addition of a \$9 fee may be a shock to those who enjoy the area.

For those who visit our parks and open spaces often enough to warrant buying an annual pass, the proposal calls for an increase from \$75 to \$95 for county residents, and from \$95 to \$125 for nonresidents.

Camping fees also would rise at county campgrounds.

Some have expressed concern that the fee increases will keep out lower-income residents, a valid worry.

The county's open space program dates back to the passage, in 1995, of a quarter-cent sales tax earmarked for preservation of open space.

In its first 20 years, it raised \$188.5 million, of which \$84 million was used by the county to preserve more than 44,000 acres. Funding also went to cities and towns in the county for land preservation.

Voters extended the sales tax in 1999, and then in 2014, approved an extension from 2019 to 2044 with an overwhelming 82 percent vote. Under the provisions of that vote, the county's share rose from 43 percent of the sales tax proceeds to 50 percent.

The 2014 ballot question promised voters the tax would be used for the "for the same purposes of: conserving natural areas, open spaces, rivers and wildlife habitat; protecting lands that preserve water quality and rivers, lakes and streams; operating, maintaining and improving natural areas, parks and trails, and protecting working farms and ranches, subject to recommendations of a citizens' advisory committee and independent audit."

While it increased the county's share of the tax proceeds to 50 percent (the rest goes to cities and towns), it said at least 50 percent of the county's share would go toward improvement, management, maintenance and administration of open space, natural areas, wildlife habitats, parks and trails.

Thirty-five percent goes to land purchases and the remaining 15 percent can be used for either purpose.

The conundrum is that as more open lands and park areas have been purchased and developed, maintenance costs for those lands have grown.

It may be time to start charging a fee at Devil's Backbone, but it's also time for county officials to dedicate that remaining 15 percent to operations of the existing areas, giving maintenance and administration of these areas 65 percent of the sales tax dollars collected.

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# Larimer County puts two Hermit Park cabins up for sale online

## Winning bidders must remove cabins by Nov. 16

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer  
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Tue Oct 09 17:36:27 MDT 2018

### Interested?

The one-room cabins, both featuring a deck, are about 20 feet long by 17 feet wide; listings can be viewed at govdeals.com. Search for "Hermit Park cabins."

If you've ever wanted to own one of the cozy rental cabins at Hermit Park, you're in luck.

Larimer County is selling two of the most popular cabins through an online public auction website. The cabins, though, do not come with the scenery and surroundings.

The winning bidders have until Nov. 16 to remove the cabin from the open space without damaging any of the surrounding resources.

The decision to sell the two back cabins, tucked away from the main cabin loop, is not sudden. In fact, Larimer County agreed to remove them a decade ago when it bought the land, which had been a private oasis for Hewlett-Packard employees, and opened it for public use.

That stipulation is part of the conservation agreement that is held by the Estes Valley Land Trust that was part of the original purchase agreement for the land, explained Chris Fleming, operations manager with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

"The two at the back of the property have been identified as being in an ecologically sensitive area, the wetlands," said Fleming.

The agreement gave the county time to remove the cabins, and the Land Trust extended that window and allowed continued rental of the cabins through the end of this summer season.

"We've run out of extensions, and quite frankly, the cabins have run out too," said Fleming, noting that they would need extensive refurbishment and maintenance to keep as rentals.

So the cabins known as Bear Claw and Madrona Point are for sale on a government auction website. The one-room cabins, both featuring a deck, are about 20 feet long by 17 feet wide; listings can be viewed at govdeals.com. Search for "Hermit Park cabins."

As of Tuesday night, the high bid for Madrona Point was \$525, while Bear Claw was selling for \$550. The auctions, which close Oct. 18, are for the cabins as is, without any of the furnishings. Those, the county can use in other properties within the Department of Natural Resources system.

The 1,362-acre open space, nestled into the hills with wetland meadows and wildlife habitat off U.S. 36 just southeast of Estes Park, has had 15 cabins for rent since it opened to the public. The removal of two of those cabins paves the way for two new cabins, which Larimer County plans to build on the property next year.

The county is still finalizing plans for the type of cabin to build and where within the park to locate them, though they may be near the main cabin loop or across from Hermit's Hollow in a small group, Fleming said.

Madrona and Bear Claw have been rented for the last time at Hermit Park, but the other cabins within the park can be rented on a walk-in basis through Dec. 20, weather depending. (People interested in renting one should call ahead to 619-4570 to make sure staff is available to rent the cabin.)

Fleming admits that both Bear Claw and Madrona are among the most popular rentals and that people are sad to see them go.

"We're sad too," she said. "They're some of our favorites, but it's the right thing to do and it's something we committed to doing."

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*Photo: Anna Staver*

# Larimer County commissioners express concern over Devil's Backbone fee proposal

Larimer County Commissioners met with partners from Harvey Economics on Monday to discuss a study and proposal that seeks to increase user and camping fees throughout Larimer County. The proposal also suggests adding a fee to the Devil's Backbone open space.

Author: Erin Robinson  
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**LARIMER COUNTY** — Larimer County Commissioners expressed some hesitations Monday during a meeting discussing a proposal to increase user and camping fees throughout Larimer County and add a fee to the Devil's Backbone open space.

Commissioners Steve Johnson, Tom Donnelly and Sean Dougherty, County Manager Linda Hoffman, and representatives from the Department of Natural Resources met with partners from Harvey Economics, a Denver-based consulting firm hired to conduct a study on the fee increases and suggest subsequent increase proposals. The firm specializes in a variety of areas, including environmental and natural resource economics, as well as tourism and recreation.

Harvey Economics presented the commissioners with a study and presentation that evaluates current user fees at reservoir parks and open spaces, as well as analyzes fee revenue as it pertains to operating and capital expenses. The firm also provided recommendations for fee levels and pricing strategies.

Daily entrance fees to Larimer County reservoir parks and open spaces have not increased in the past 10 years. Since 2008, annual entrance permit prices have increased by \$10, and a handful of camping fees have increase by \$5.

Harvey Economics suggested that without fee increases, reservoir parks' operating costs are estimated to be 30 percent greater than fee revenues. The proposal suggests raising daily vehicle entrance fees for reservoir parks and open spaces to \$9 in 2019. Right now, those fees are \$7 for reservoir parks and \$6 for open spaces. The firm estimates simple fee increases at both parks and open spaces will bring in approximately \$1.4 million in additional revenue per year.

The Devil's Backbone open space has never required an entrance fee, but would under the new proposal. That fee would be the same as all other open spaces: \$9 per vehicle, per day. Harvey Economics said it believes the fees at Devil's Backbone will add \$500,000 per year in additional revenue.

Some of the commissioners expressed concern over the new fee, saying the fee is high for many members of the community and the people of Larimer County have already paid for the land with their tax dollars.

In addition to daily entrance fees, the proposal suggests higher rates for camping on weekends and holidays. Harvey Economics said it believes this will bring in an additional \$200,000 per year.

The firm also suggested opportunities for low income visitors. They suggest free entrance for those walking or biking into the parks and open spaces, free or discount entrance through educational partnerships (school programs) and discounted senior and disabled entrance permits. Commissioners suggested the idea of occasional free days.

The study's findings will be presented to additional advisory boards moving forward. The Department of Natural Resources is also seeking input from the public on the fee proposals.

Public meetings and hearings have not yet been set, but will be scheduled in the coming months. Larimer County officials are hoping to have a final decision on the proposal in December.

## Larimer County to discuss Devil's Backbone fee at open house

**Reporter-Herald Staff**

Loveland Reporter-Herald

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LOVELAND — The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources will take input from the public Monday, Oct. 22, on proposed changes to fees for Larimer County parks and open spaces, including at Devil's Backbone Open Space.

The fee study public open house will take place at 6-8 p.m. Monday at the Larimer County Loveland Campus, 200 Peridot Ave., Loveland, in the Big T River and Poudre River rooms.

The county is considering raising per-vehicle entrance fees to \$9 at areas where fees already are charged and introducing a \$9 fee at Devil's Backbone in west Loveland.

"Devil's Backbone trailhead is currently the only intensively managed location in Larimer County's park and open space system where we do not collect a fee," Natural Resources Director Gary Buffington said in a press release.

People can get more details on the fee study and offer feedback to Natural Resources staff at the open house on Oct. 22, as well as at second open house is being planned for November at a location in Fort Collins.

For more information on the fee study and open house, please contact Natural Resources Director Gary Buffington at 619-4560 or [gbuffer@larimer.org](mailto:gbuffer@larimer.org).

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