

# Larimer County could raise entrance fees for parks and open space

Open house on Monday to discuss fee changes

**BY:** [Liz Gelardi](#)

**POSTED:** 2:34 PM, Oct 19, 2018

**UPDATED:** 5 hours ago

**TAG:** [larimer county](#) | [fees](#) | [parks](#) | [open space](#) | [entrance fees](#)

Share Article

**Editor's Note:** *'Our Colorado' stories help natives and newcomers navigate the challenges related to our rapidly growing state, including real estate and development, homelessness, transportation and more. To comment on this or other 360 stories, email us at [OurCO@TheDenverChannel.com](mailto:OurCO@TheDenverChannel.com). See more 'Our Colorado' stories [here](#).*

LARIMER COUNTY, Colo. — Entrance fees for Larimer County parks and open space have not been raised in more than a decade, but during that time there's been a dramatic increase in use.

Colorado's growth is one of the factors county officials are considering as they study current pricing.

"A lot of these areas are intensively used and we see a lot of capacity issues. It takes more time and staff and personnel and things to address those issues," said Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director for Larimer County.

Devil's Backbone Open Space is one example of significant visitor growth. In 2014, the area saw 67,936 visitors — and that number is expected to exceed 100,000 next year.

Larimer County hired a Denver-based company to conduct a fee study. The study projects a \$2 increase for Carter Lake, Flatiron, Pinewood and Horsetooth reservoirs. It currently costs \$7 to get in.

Fees for campsites at those reservoirs could be increased, too. The price for an electric campsite from April to September could go up from \$25 to \$32.

The study also suggests raising fees at open spaces from \$6 to \$9.

The proposed increases aren't final and there will be an opportunity for public input. Larimer County is holding an open house to discuss the fee changes on Oct. 22 from 6-8 p.m. at the Larimer County Loveland Campus. More information on the fee study and open house is available [here](#).

Copyright 2018 Scripps Media, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

# As Larimer County considers raising park and open space fees, what about lottery money?

Proposed fee increase not final yet

**BY:** Liz Gelardi

**POSTED:** 5:12 PM, Oct 22, 2018

**UPDATED:** 6:50 PM, Oct 22, 2018

**TAG:** larimer county | natural resources | parks | open space | fees

Share Article

**Editor's Note:** *Denver7 360 stories explore multiple sides of the topics that matter most to Coloradans, bringing in different perspectives so you can make up your own mind about the issues. To comment on this or other 360 stories, email us at 360@TheDenverChannel.com. See more 360 stories here.*

LARIMER COUNTY, Colo. -- Coloradans are passionate about the outdoors, but when it comes to access there's a debate over how much parks and open space should charge for admission.

The debate started after Denver7 aired a story about a proposed fee increase for Larimer County parks, open space and camping.

Many viewers wrote in to share their thoughts about a possible increase to use these outdoor spaces.

One woman wrote, "I certainly understand the need to maintain trails but I don't agree with fee



The advertisement features the Brunswick Companies logo on the left, which consists of a stylized 'B' inside a circle above the text 'BRUNSWICK COMPANIES'. The main image shows four men in business suits standing in a line, looking towards the right. To the right of the image, the text reads 'Court Bond Experts with 45+ Years of Experience.' and a button labeled 'GET' is partially visible.

close

Other outdoor enthusiasts say they can live with an increase, especially as more and more people move to the Front Range.

"I'm fine with it, I just feel like this area in particular is getting overcrowded," said Eric Lundy, a mountain biker.

### **What about the lottery?**

The Natural Resources budget for Larimer County was \$25 million in 2017 and state lottery funds contributed \$650,000.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) uses a portion of lottery proceeds for the state's wildlife, parks, rivers, trails and open spaces. Executive Director, Chris Castilian, said although the lottery is expected to bring in \$68 million for GOCO this year, it still isn't enough to "solve everybody's problems."

"We're seeing a demand on GOCO's resources right now that's about three to one and so for every dollar that we give out we're seeing local government's needs tripling in effect and the population is only going up," said Castilian.

### **Background**

Larimer County hired a Denver-based company to conduct a fee study. The study projects a \$2 increase for Carter Lake, Flatiron, Pinewood and Horsetooth reservoirs. It currently costs \$7 to get in.

Fees for campsites at those reservoirs could be increased, too. The price for an electric campsite from April to September could go up from \$25 to \$32.

The study also suggests raising fees at open spaces from \$6 to \$9.

The proposed increases aren't final and there will be an opportunity for public input. Larimer County is holding an open house to discuss the fee changes on Oct. 22 from 6-8 p.m. at the Larimer County Loveland Campus. More information on the fee study and open house is available [here](#).

Copyright 2018 Scripps Media, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

# Loveland residents speak out on proposed Devil's Backbone fee

## Larimer County holds open house

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer  
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Mon Oct 22 21:47:20 MDT 2018

Loveland residents love the Devil's Backbone Open Space and want to see it maintained but do not necessarily like the idea of paying a fee at the open space that has been free for 18 years.

Those opinions were prevalent among the steady stream of people who attended an open house Monday to learn about the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources' proposal to add a fee at the popular open space west of Loveland starting in January.

If approved, the Devil's Backbone would be one of four open spaces with a daily entrance fee of \$9 — the same amount to be paid at county parks under a proposal to increase fees about 30 percent. The rest of the open spaces owned and operated by Larimer County would continue to have free entrance.

"I wouldn't want to pay that much money to go up there and hike for an hour," said resident Roberta Thorpe. "We paid for it with taxes. It feels like they're wanting to charge us again."

Larimer County has a sales tax that is dedicated to open spaces with a portion of it set aside for operations and a larger percent dedicated to buying new properties. Voters in 2014 extended that tax another 25 years, starting in January, with a higher portion of the revenue for operations and maintenance.

"It wasn't that long ago," resident Rick Allison said of the vote to extend the tax with a larger share for maintenance. "On the other hand, the population is booming."

The increased population and increased visitation at the Devil's Backbone — a jump from 67,936 visitors in 2014 to an expected 100,480 next year — are causing a need for more management and maintenance at the site, according to the proposal for the added fee.

The county needs the money to maintain the level of service at the site, which costs \$562,000 per year to operate, the proposal states. Adding a fee at the Backbone would bring in about \$500,000 per year, which would be spent at that site only to maintain the outdoor experience and would free up other money in the open lands budget for other open spaces and outdoor uses.

The numbers are based on a fee study by consultant Harvey Economics, which has drawn mixed reviews and comments at several meetings.

Allison said that he understands the increased use but is still torn about the idea of adding a fee, particularly in light of the recently extended sales tax. He suggested that, if a fee is implemented, the county offer discounted annual passes through schools and nonprofits to keep the outdoors accessible to people who can't afford to pay the cost of the daily fee or annual pass.

"I go to the Backbone all the time at lunch," Allison said. "I'll probably just quit going."

He added, "There's never enough money, but at some point, we have to just keep it simple."

Many who work for the natural resources department along with those who sit on the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board attended the open house in Loveland to hear these opinions and answer questions. They heard a variety of opinions and a bunch of questions about the reason behind the fee proposal.

"People, I think, are largely undecided but curious to learn more, and that's fair," said Dave Marvin, advisory board member.

Those who attended the open house were encouraged to fill out a survey that included some other options suggested after the initial fee proposal — reducing service at the Backbone to keep it free, keeping the day pass at \$6 instead of increasing it to \$9 or making the open space a fee area Friday through Monday and free on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Resident Nancy Condiff had another suggestion — raise more money to pay for operations by ticketing people who do not follow the leash law at the county open spaces. The Devil's Backbone is one of only two free areas around Loveland that also allow dogs; others either charge or ban dogs, she said.

"They need to keep it free if at all possible," said Condiff, later adding, "I'm not going to pay nine bucks for a hike. That's ridiculous."

Scott James, who has lived in Larimer County for three years, said he cherishes the open spaces and outdoor opportunities. He volunteers with trail maintenance and spends a lot of time outdoors.

"The open areas or natural areas are such a draw," said James. "I came from the Atlanta area, and we didn't have things like this. My concern is making sure they are kept up. I hate to see fees go up, but something has to be done."

Yet, he pointed out that the fee could prevent some people from being able to afford to go to the Backbone and suggested the county find ways to provide access for those residents as well.

The county will continue to gather input, which could be incorporated into the overall fee proposal before it goes to the Larimer County commissioners, who will have a public hearing and vote on the issue before the end of the year.

Details on the proposal are available online at [larimer.org/naturalresources](http://larimer.org/naturalresources).

*Pamela Johnson: 970-699-5405, [johnsonp@reporter-herald.com](mailto:johnsonp@reporter-herald.com)*

Close Window

Send To Printer

# Open house on Devil's Backbone fee, increased parks prices slated in Fort Collins

**By Reporter-Herald Staff**  
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Tue Oct 30 11:35:05 MDT 2018

Larimer County will hold a public open house in Fort Collins next week to offer information and collect feedback on a proposal to increase fees at county parks and open spaces, including adding a fee at the Devil's Backbone west of Loveland.

The county hired consultant Harvey Economics to look at its fees for parks and open spaces, and the resulting recommendations were to increase the daily vehicle fee at parks and some open spaces to \$9, to raise camping fees across the board with a steeper increase on holidays and weekends and to add a fee at the Devil's Backbone, which has traditionally been free.

"The department is funded primarily through a sales tax and user fees," Natural Resources Director Gary Buffington said in a press release, "and we have a responsibility to maintain financial stability."

Feedback has been mixed with some saying they understand the need to increase fees to cover costs, some arguing that adding a fee at the Backbone is like making residents pay for something they already bought with taxes and others pointing out that voters just increased the open space sales tax with a increased portion for operations and maintenance.

The Larimer County commissioners, who will make the ultimate decision, too, seemed mixed on the idea, while others said they understand increasing costs, particularly at the Devil's Backbone which is so widely use it needs to be managed more like a county park than an open space.

One open house was held in Loveland on Oct. 22, and a second is scheduled on Nov. 7 in Fort Collins. The open house will be held 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the hearing room on the first floor of the Larimer County Courthouse Offices, 200 W. Oak St., in Fort Collins.

Close Window

Send To Printer