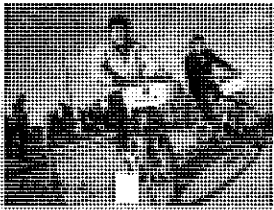


First paved trail between Loveland and Fort Collins opens

Alicia Stice, astice@coloradoan.com Published 5:06 p.m. MT Nov. 14, 2017 | Updated 8:43 a.m. MT Nov. 15, 2017



(Photo: Austin Humphreys/The Coloradoan)

Cyclists, get excited.

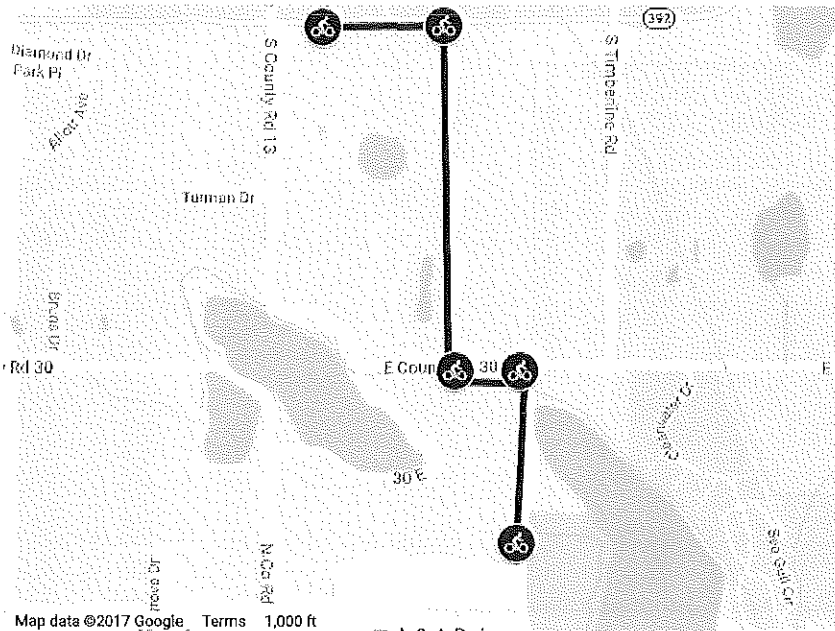
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It's now a lot easier and safer to get between Fort Collins and Loveland on two wheels. On Tuesday, the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources opened the **Front Range Trail connection between Loveland to Fort Collins**.

"Fort Collins has its paved trail system, and Loveland has its paved trail system, and after today, they've officially been connected," said Teddy Parker-Renga, spokesman for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

The \$1.2 million Colorado Front Range Trail — Loveland to Fort Collins Connection is open to pedestrian and cyclists, and spans 2 miles. In Fort Collins, it picks up on Carpenter Road, near its intersection with Lemay Avenue and joins with a Loveland Recreation Trail near Boyd Lake State Park.

Trail between Loveland and Fort Collins



The Colorado Department of Transportation contributed a \$450,000 grant to help pay for the project, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife's State Trails Program contributed a grant of \$350,000. Loveland, Larimer County and Fort Collins covered the remaining \$400,000 cost of building the trail.

Fort Collins and Loveland officials first identified the area as a possible location for a trail in 2002, hoping it could be a segment of the larger Front Range Trail System, which officials ultimately hope will extend from New Mexico to Wyoming.

"These projects take a lot of time," Parker-Renga said about the process of building and funding trails. "The idea has been out there for quite a while, and the fruits of that labor came to reality today."

The new connection is one of two between Fort Collins and Loveland set to open in the next year. The Long View Corridor Trail will run for 4.4 miles along the west side of Fort Collins and Loveland, along Shields Street in Fort Collins and Taft Avenue in Loveland. It is set to open in the next year.

New trails

- The Loveland to Fort Collins Front Range Trail that opened Tuesday allows people to travel from the 35 miles of paved trails in Fort Collins to 18 miles of paved trails in Loveland. It picks up on Carpenter Road near Lemay Avenue and runs south between Lemay and Timberline Road until it joins with a Loveland Recreation Trail near Boyd Lake State Park.
- The Long View Corridor Trail will run for 4.4 miles along the west side of Fort Collins and Loveland, along Shields Street in Fort Collins and Taft Avenue in Loveland. It is set to open in the next year.
- Fort Collins plans to extend the Fossil Creek Trail to connect Shields Street to College Avenue. That is set for completion this summer.

RECREATION TRAIL & BIKEWAYS MAP

WILDLIFE IN LOVELAND IS EVERYWHERE

Photo by Dave Renna for the Front Range Trail System. The map shows various trail routes and landmarks in Loveland, including Boyd Lake State Park and the Front Range Trail. A legend identifies different types of trails: Existing Trails, Existing Open Lands, Existing City Lots, and Proposed Trails. A scale bar indicates distances up to 1 mile. A note at the bottom states: "PLEASE BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY AT ALL TIMES".

RECREATION TRAIL & BIKEWAYS MAP

WILDLIFE IN LOVELAND IS EVERYWHERE

Photo by Dave Renna for the Front Range Trail System. The map shows various trail routes and landmarks in Loveland, including Boyd Lake State Park and the Front Range Trail. A legend identifies different types of trails: Existing Trails, Existing Open Lands, Existing City Lots, and Proposed Trails. A scale bar indicates distances up to 1 mile. A note at the bottom states: "PLEASE BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY AT ALL TIMES".

Trail links Loveland and Fort Collins

2-mile trail spans from Boyd Lake to Carpenter Road

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Tue Nov 14 18:34:33 MST 2017

Before dignitaries had even cut the ribbon on the Front Range Trail on Tuesday, Marty Perkins and Nancy Thomas pedaled by on their bicycles, having made their first trip to Loveland from Fort Collins on two wheels via the first paved trail connecting the two cities.

"Thank you very much," Perkins called out to the gathering. "It's awesome."

The paved trail connects the existing 19.5-mile Loveland Recreation Trail with the Fort Collins trail system along County Roads 11C and 30 before cutting through fields and neighborhoods and ending at an underpass beneath Carpenter Road near Lemay Avenue.

The \$1.2 million project was a partnership between Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County, which each paid a portion of the cost over \$800,000 in grants from the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

"We have great collaborative relationships," said County Commissioner Tom Donnelly. "This is the most tangible way to show it, a \$1.2 million trail project that was 15 years in the making."

The idea for the trail was planted even earlier than that, according to Lee Gregory, a Fort Collins resident who served on a Loveland open lands advisory board about 25 years ago. Back then, when the Loveland Recreation Trail was in its infancy, a Loveland trail planner stepped forward when an underpass was being built beneath Carpenter Road to request it be large enough and paved for a future trail to connect the two cities.

For 25 years, that poor lonely underpass has been waiting for a trail," said Gregory.

That wait is over. This new piece of the Front Range Trail connects to that underpass.

The trail officially opened and barricades were removed on Tuesday afternoon. Officials from both cities, the county, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Department of Transportation and the contractor, Zak Dirt, gathered on the northern end for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Officials from each of the cities and the county spoke about how paved trails are a top priority for residents and this one, in particular, fills a need by connecting the communities for commuters and for those who simply want to expand their trail options for recreation.

Perkins and Thomas, who live in Fort Collins, rode all the way to Boyd Lake State Park in Loveland.

"It's awesome to have another 30 miles of safe, connected bikeways," added Perkins.

Fort Collins resident Melissa Collins also was excited for the connection because, until now, she drove to Loveland, hauling her bicycle, to meet up with the Loveland PEDAL Club for rides. Now, she can ride all the way from her home to Loveland on a paved trail.

"I'm so excited," she said. "I'm so appreciative."

In fact, residents can now ride all the way from Fort Collins to the Loveland Civic Center without crossing any major highways or arterial roads, noted Elizabeth Kayl, Loveland parks and recreation director.

"This makes biking, running, hiking safer," she said.

Eventually, the new 2-mile piece of trail and existing trails in the cities will be part of a much larger Front Range Trail with a vision of connecting cities all the way from Wyoming to New Mexico.

While this is the first paved trail connecting Loveland to Fort Collins, a second will be built this winter and next spring with the target of opening next summer.

The Longview Trail, which will parallel Taft Avenue (Shields Street in Fort Collins), will pick up where the city trail ends at 57th Street and Taft Avenue, tying into Sunset Vista Natural Area in Loveland. Again, this trail is a cooperative effort by Loveland, Fort Collins and Larimer County.

Ray Martinez, Fort Collins city councilman, added, "That is just another great one that's coming on board."

Pamela Johnson: 970-699-5405, johnsonp@reporter-herald.com, www.twitter.com/RHPamelaJ

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Star-gazing programs set at Devil's Backbone

by Reporter-Herald Staff
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Thu Nov 30 01:00:00 MST 2017

Larimer County Natural Resources will offer two events in December for people interested in the night sky.

An Earth and Sky Night Hike will take place at 5-7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 8, at Devil's Backbone Open Space, just west of Loveland on U.S. 34.

Participants can learn to identify stars and constellations, and will hear stories about them.

The program includes a moderate hike. Dress appropriately for the weather, bring along water and a headlamp if you have one.

At 7:30-9:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 15, go stargazing with the Northern Colorado Astronomical Society at Devil's Backbone.

Members will bring telescopes for viewing stars, galaxies, planets and more at the open house-style program.

Dress for evening temperatures and bring binoculars if you have them.

Both programs are free, but registration is required at offer0.larimer.org.

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3 sought for starting fire at Horsetooth Reservoir

Reporter-Herald Staff
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Sat Dec 02 20:19:34 MST 2017

FORT COLLINS — The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources, Horsetooth Parks Office, is asking for public help to identify three possible suspects in an arson fire at Duncan's Ridge at Horsetooth Reservoir Saturday afternoon.

According to a press release, at about 12:48 p.m. Saturday, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources park rangers and Poudre Fire Authority responded to a small fire on Duncan's Ridge, a popular rock climbing recreational area at Horsetooth Reservoir.

The fire was reported by climbers and hikers in the area, and several informants reported seeing one adult man and two adult women in the area prior to the fire starting.

"The trio were reportedly taking photographs and using what was described as pyrotechnic 'smoke bombs' as an added photo effect," the release said.

One of the women reportedly held one of the smoke bombs in her hand while it was activated, causing her to be burned. She reportedly dropped it on the ground, subsequently starting a small fire.

Climbers and hikers nearby reported the fire, then quickly put the fire out using water from their water bottles. Poudre Fire Authority personnel responded and ensured the fire was completely out.

Park rangers asked for the assistance of the public in identifying the three suspects who fled from the scene.

They were described as a white man in his early to mid-20s, with long brown hair and a full beard, wearing a white shirt and carrying a large camera; a white woman in her early to mid-20s with a thin build, blond hair, wearing a black shirt and black leggings; and a woman in her 20s, with a medium to heavy build, wearing a white sweater and black pants.

It is believed that one of the women sustained a burn on one of her hands.

Although no information was obtained, it is believed the three suspects may have left in a vehicle.

According to the release, the suspects face possible criminal charges including: firing woods and prairie, a Class 6 felony; reckless endangerment, a Class 3 misdemeanor, and various parks violations.

Park Ranger Cindy Kirby is requesting that anyone who may have information to help identify the suspects contact her by phone at 970-498-5601.

Anyone with information regarding this incident or any crime can call Larimer County Sheriff's Office at 970-416-1985 or Crime Stoppers at 970-221-6868 where they will remain anonymous and possibly be eligible for a cash reward.

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Trio suspected of arson in small fire near Horsetooth Reservoir

[Christopher Abshire](mailto:cabshire@coloradoan.com), cabshire@coloradoan.com Published 7:43 p.m. MT Dec. 2, 2017



(Photo: Erin Hull/The Coloradoan)

The Larimer County Sheriff's Office is seeking public assistance to identify three people suspected of arson Saturday at Duncan's Ridge near Horsetooth Reservoir, according to a county news release.

Park rangers and Poudre Fire Authority responded to the "small fire" at the popular rock climbing spot around 12:50 p.m. Saturday.

Hikers and climbers in the area reported seeing an adult male and two adult women around the scene of the fire in the moments before the blaze.

According to the release, those eyewitnesses also saw one of the women with a pyrotechnic "smoke bomb" that activated in her hand, causing her to be burned. She reportedly dropped it on the ground soon after, and that's believed to be the origin of the fire.

Nearby hikers helped keep the fire at bay with water from water bottles until PFA arrived and put the fire out completely.

The group was taking photos of the "smoke bombs" before the blaze broke out, and they left the scene before authorities arrived (potentially in a vehicle).

Here are descriptions for the three suspects, per LCSO:

1. Adult, white male, early to mid-20's, with long brown hair and a full beard, wearing a white shirt and carrying a large camera.
2. Adult white female, thin build, blonde hair, early to mid-20's, wearing a black shirt, and black leggings.
3. Adult Female, medium to heavy build, in her 20's, wearing a white sweater, and black pants.

The trio faces possible charges that could include a felony for starting the fire on park land and a misdemeanor for reckless endangerment.


Park Ranger Cindy Kirby is requesting that anyone who may have information which might help identify the suspects, please contact her by phone at 970-498-5601.

Anyone with information regarding this incident or any crime is also asked to call Larimer County Sheriff's Office at 970-416-1985 or Crime Stoppers at 970-221-6868 where you will remain anonymous and possibly be eligible for a cash reward.

Poudre Fire Authority: [Recent Fort Collins grass fire was intentionally set \(/story/news/2017/12/01/poudre-fire-authority-fort-collins-grass-fire-intentionally-set/914191001/\)](#)

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Hermit Park Open Space seasonal closure begins Dec. 20

 Reporter-Herald Staff
_loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Wed Dec 13 20:03:34 MST 2017

ESTES PARK — Hermit Park Open Space, southeast of Estes Park, will close for the season Wednesday, Dec. 20, according to a park press release.

Hermit Park will remain closed during the winter months because of wintry weather conditions and protection of wintering range for big game animals, such as elk.

The open space will reopen to the public March 1, 2018, though all dates are weather dependent and subject to change.

Questions can be directed to the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources Administrative Offices at 970-619-4570.

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Proposed boat stamp would pay for mussel inspections

by Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Wed Dec 27 19:44:54 MST 2017

Wildlife managers hope legislators will pass a bill early in 2018 to provide the money needed to continue boat inspections to protect Colorado waters and infrastructure from invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

Last spring, Larimer County and state officials scrambled to piece together money to pay for inspections at Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir, which are free of these harmful mussels, after a court ruling shrunk state funding for the program.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which traditionally paid for the inspections statewide, came up with \$100,000, and the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources and Northern Water each pitched in the same amount. The county manages recreation at the reservoirs, while Northern Water manages and distributes the actual water to farmers and municipalities.

However, members of the Northern Water Board stressed at the time that their contribution was a one-time deal and that the state would need to find another, permanent source of funding for the future.

As of now, funding is available for 2018 but is not set in stone beyond the coming summer, according to information from Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

A bill to raise the money through a fee on boaters and a surcharge on fishing licenses failed in the legislature last year. But legislators did pass a "backup bill" that provided funding for 2018 to give them more time to work on a permanent solution, explained Ken Brink Jr., visitor services manager for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

The Mussel Free Colorado Act, sponsored by the water resources review committee, is expected to be introduced to legislators in early 2018 and, if passed, would provide funding starting in 2019 by requiring boaters to buy an aquatic nuisance species stamp. These fees, \$25 for Colorado residents and \$50 for out-of-state boaters, would generate about \$2.4 million per year and could increase with inflation, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The legislation also would increase the penalties for boaters who launch on lakes and reservoirs without an inspection from \$50 to \$100 and continues existing severance tax appropriations for the program.

The state's Aquatic Nuisance Species Act, approved in 2008, required boat inspections starting in 2009 at many lakes and reservoirs across the state — a program that has resulted in more than 3.5 million boat inspections, that wildlife officials say truly has protected waters and that is a model to other states.

In fact, those inspections kept 25 mussel-infested boats off Colorado waters in 2017, keeping at bay a threat that state officials believe will likely increase as infestations spread nationwide through boats that move from water to water.

Pamela Johnson: 970-699-5405, johnsonp@reporter-herald.com, www.twitter.com/RHPamelaJ.

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Prescribed burns west of Pinewood Reservoir planned through spring

Reporter-Herald Staff
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Tue Jan 02 12:03:52 MST 2018

Intentional burns of slash piles on Pinewood Reservoir State Land west of Loveland could begin later this month.

Multiple prescribed fires are scheduled for the area throughout the winter and spring of 2018, a Tuesday press release from the Colorado State Forest Service said.

The planned burns will be conducted only in certain conditions, including adequate snow on the ground.

The burns are meant to reduce remaining woody fuels as a public safety precaution. The existing piles are the result of forest restoration projects that could create open, low-density ponderosa stands, the release said.

Pile burning will be conducted by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and may continue through the spring, the release said. Smoke from prescribed health may affect your health, the release said. For more information on how smoke can affect your health, visit www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health.

For more information on the prescribed burns, contact the Colorado State Forest Service Fort Collins District at 970-491-8445.

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Larimer County approves open space purchase near Horsetooth

Saja Hindi, shindi@coloradoan.com Published 8:43 a.m. MT Jan. 3, 2018



(Photo: Coloradoan library)

A partnership between Larimer County, the city of Fort Collins and Go Outdoors Colorado will fund the more than \$1 million purchase of 320 acres of open space within the Devil's Backbone Open Space to Horsetooth Mountain Open Space area.

The purchase is the final for Larimer County from its GOCO Protect Initiative award to preserve about 2,500 acres of land in the Foothills area.

The grant funded about \$47 million over a three-year period for conservation across the state. Larimer County partnered with the City of Fort Collins on its projects, supported by about \$5 million from GOCO.

Larimer County commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved the county's contribution of \$369,750, also unanimously recommended by the Open Lands Advisory Board in November.

The city of Fort Collins will also contribute \$369,750, and GOCO will contribute \$300,500.

Local: [Rats abandoned in Fort Collins natural areas available for adoption \(/story/news/local/2017/12/31/rats-abandoned-fort-collins-natural-areas-available-adoption/993447001/\)](#)

Funding from Larimer County will come from its Help Preserve Open Space sales tax.

Commissioner Tom Donnelly commended the Natural Resources Department for its work, saying there aren't a lot of options for this kind of conservation and it takes years of effort on the part of staff members.

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"The reality is as the county urbanizes, as we continue to grow, the need for these recreational activities is really going to continue to grow as well," he said.


The property is owned by Marabeth and John White and will be split into two sales of 180 acres from the Whites and 140 acres from their charitable trust, a Larimer County memo states. The property is about 1.5 miles south of County Road 38E, adjacent to the county's Rimrock Open Space and BlueSky Trail.

Open Lands Manager Kerri Rollins said the land would continue to be used for grazing, but it would give the county the option to create additional trails in the future.

Reporter Saja Hindi covers public safety and local politics. You can follow her on Twitter @BySajaHindi or email her at shindi@coloradoan.com.

Life of a ranger: [Loose llamas, parking pressures and 'a lot of naked people' \(/story/news/2017/12/20/life-fort-collins-ranger-loose-llamas-parking-pressures-and-lot-naked-people/966863001/\)](#)

Larimer County, Fort Collins buying land near Devil's Backbone

 Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Tue Jan 02 15:10:21 MST 2018

Larimer County and Fort Collins are spending just more \$1 million to buy 320 acres near the Devils Backbone Open Space and along the Blue Sky Trail — the last purchase in a larger effort to preserve 2,500 acres between Horsetooth Mountain Open Space west of Fort Collins and the backbone west of Loveland.

The money comes from sales tax revenue that voters approved solely for open spaces and from a Great Outdoors Colorado grant, which funnels lottery money into parks and open spaces throughout the state.

The county commissioners on Tuesday unanimously voted to spend \$369,750 — the same amount Fort Collins will pay — while the grant will cover the remaining \$300,500.

"The reality is as the county urbanizes, as we continue to grow, the need for these recreational opportunities is going to continue to grow," said Tom Donnelly, county commissioner. "There really aren't a lot of options for enhanced recreation opportunities."

The land, which will be purchased from John and Marabeth White and from their charitable trust, will continue to be used as grazing land once the county takes ownership, but there is the possibility for future development of trails, explained Kerri Rollins, the county's open lands director.

This purchase is the last included in a bigger vision to protect about 2,500 acres in the area west and south of Horsetooth Reservoir. Larimer County and Fort Collins worked together, spending their own money and using \$5 million in grants from Great Outdoors Colorado, on eight separate transactions — some outright purchases of the land and others protection through conservation easement.

These include 777 acres adjacent to Coyote Ridge Natural Area called the Spring Canyon Ranch and 1,000 acres of the William Harold Wright ranch near Horsetooth Mountain Open Space as well as a preservation of acres at a site known as Rimrock Ranch and 300 acres on the west side of Horsetooth known as the Sanem property.

Pamela Johnson: 970-699-5405, johnsonp@reporter-herald.com, www.twitter.com/RHPamelaJ.

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Larimer County naturalists plan supermoon hike Jan. 31

 Reporter-Herald Staff
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Wed Jan 03 16:56:57 MST 2018

Skywatchers enjoyed views of a "supermoon" on Jan. 1, and will get a chance to see a second one on Wednesday, Jan. 31.

Larimer County naturalists will celebrate the astronomical combination — the second full moon of January and a supermoon — by offering a moonlit exploration of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space at 5-7 p.m. Jan. 31.

At the "Blue Supermoon Over My Open Space" two-mile hike, participants can learn about our closest celestial neighbor and nocturnal wildlife.

The hike is rated moderate. Participants should bring a flashlight, water and closed-toe shoes and dress appropriately for the weather.

The program is free, but a \$6 day-use fee applies, and registration is required. Go to offer.larimer.org to sign up.

For details, call Heather at 619-4489.

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January Guided Hikes and Programs on Larimer County Open Spaces

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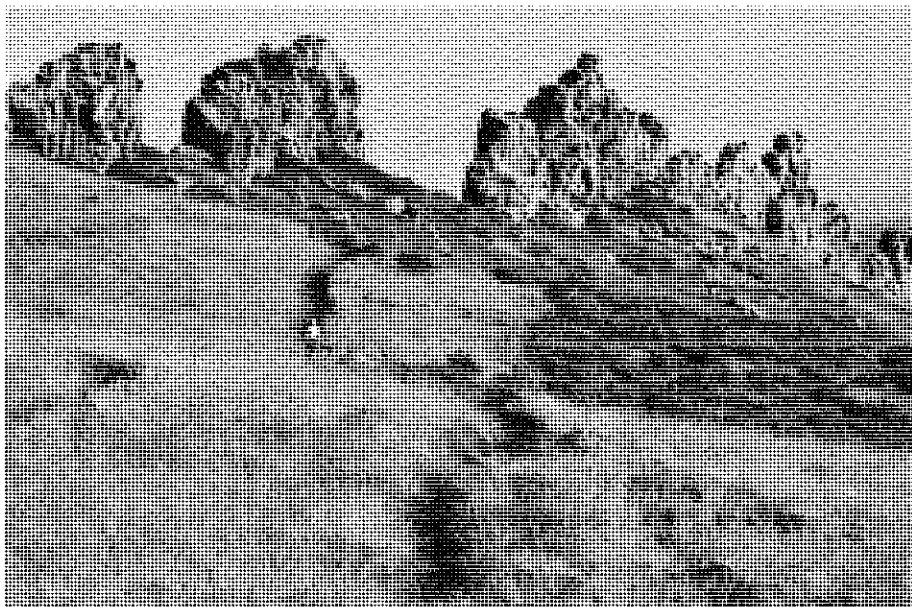
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A portion of Devil's Backbone in Loveland



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Friday, January 12, 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. "Stargazing with the Northern Colorado Astronomical Society" Join members of the Northern Colorado Astronomical Society (NCAS) for an up-close look at

the night sky over the Rockies. Telescopes will be available for viewing stars, galaxies, planets and more. This open house-style program is located at the Devil's Backbone Open Space trailhead, located just west of Loveland off Hwy 34. Dress warmly for evening temperatures and bring binoculars if you have them. Program is free. Go to offer0.larimer.org to sign up. Registration is encouraged, but not required. For up-to-date weather information, visit the NCAS website at www.nocoastro.org. Direct questions to Heather at (970) 619-4489.

Wednesday, January 31, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. "Blue Supermoon Over My Open Space" Join Larimer County naturalists to celebrate this astronomical combination – the second full moon of January and a supermoon – by going on a moonlit exploration of Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. Learn about our closest celestial neighbor and nocturnal wildlife on this 2-mile, round-trip hike. Hike rating: Moderate. Participants should bring a flashlight, water and closed-toe shoes and dress appropriately for the weather. Approximately 2-hour hike. Program is free, but a \$6 day-use fee applies. **Registration is**

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Larimer County Natural Resources seeks Visual Artist applications

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

Posted: Tue Jan 09 18:48:10 MST 2018

LOVELAND — Larimer County is seeking applications for the 2018 Visual Artist of the Year.

The chosen artist will create artwork inspired by the county's parks and open spaces that will hang outside the county commissioners' office for a year, anything from painting to photography, and then donate the finished piece to Larimer County for public viewing at a county building.

During the year, the artist also is asked to host one public art-related program.

The artist will receive a complimentary annual entrance permit to county parks and open spaces, valued at \$75, and will be featured at a public celebration of the artwork.

Applications are due by 4:30 p.m. Feb. 23, For more information, visit www.larimer.org/naturalresources/photography-art/artist.

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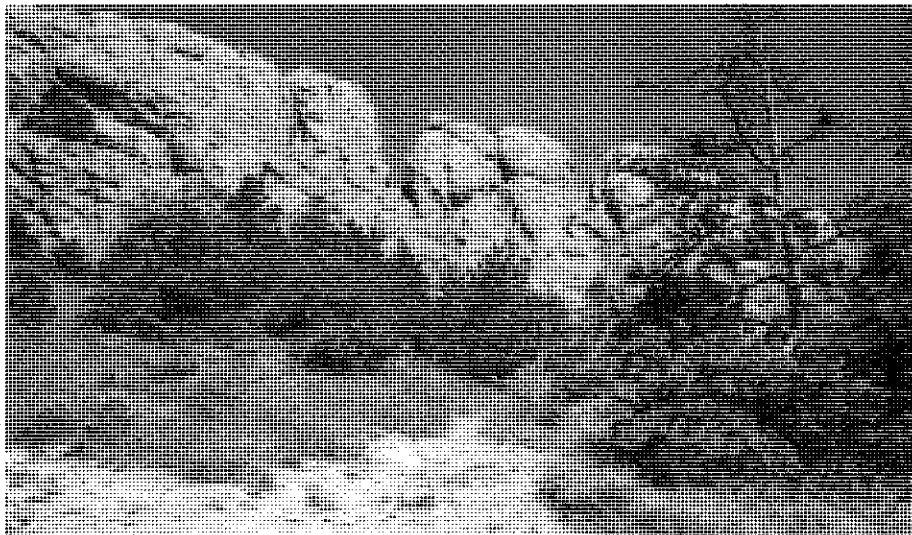
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Guided Hikes and Events
Saturday, February 3, 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. "Stargazing with the Northern Colorado Astronomical

Society" Join members of the Northern Colorado Astronomical Society (NCAS) for an up-close look at the night sky over the Rockies. Telescopes will be available for viewing stars, galaxies, planets and more. This open house-style program is located at the Devil's Backbone Open Space trailhead, located just west of Loveland off Hwy 34. Dress warmly for evening temps and bring binoculars if you have them. Program is free. Sign up at offero.larimer.org.

Registration is encouraged, but not required. For up-to-date weather information, visit the NCAS website at www.nocoastro.org. Direct questions to Heather at (970) 619-4489.

Friday, February 9, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. "Earth and Sky Night Hike" Join Larimer County naturalists on an evening hike full of stargazing at Devil's Backbone Open Space, located just west of Loveland off Hwy 34. Learn to identify stars and constellations, and hear their stories throughout the program. Hike rating: Moderate (due to hiking with low light). Please dress appropriately for the weather and bring along some water for the trail and a headlamp if you have one. Program is free, but registration is required. Sign up at offero.larimer.org. Direct questions to Heather at (970) 619-4489.

Saturday, February 17, 8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. "CSI: Critter Scene Investigations" Become a wildlife detective with Larimer County naturalists as you hunt for clues and signs of animal activity at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, located just west of Fort Collins off County Road 38E. In this family-friendly program, you'll discover the stories behind animal's everyday lives as you learn to read scats, tracks and signs. Program is free, but a \$6 day use fee applies. Registration is required. Sign up at offero.larimer.org. Direct questions to Heather at (970) 619-4489.



DEVIL'S BACKBONE OPEN SPACE

HORSETOOTH MOUNTAIN OPEN SPACE

LARIMER COUNTY

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Larimer County breaks camping records

More people visited county parks in 2017

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer
Loveland Reporter-Herald

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A record number of people visited and camped at Larimer County's parks in 2017, and campers already are booking sites for the coming summer including in a brand new loop at Carter Lake.

The Carter Lake District, located west of Loveland including Carter Lake, Pinewood and Flatiron Reservoirs, recorded 19,030 nights of camping in 2017, while Hermit Park campsites logged 6,601 nights and Horsetooth tallied 21,230 nights.

"Those were all records for us, the most camping we've had in a summer," said Ken Brink Jr., the visitor services manager for Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources.

One night of camping is logged for each overnight stay in each campground in the county, so the numbers are tallied per campsite and not by the number of people who are camping.

And those numbers were just at campsites, not including the cabins at both Hermit Park near Estes Park and Horsetooth Reservoir west of Fort Collins. Cabin rentals added another 3,079 nights to the overall camping tally.

Plus, record numbers of people also bought day passes to visit Larimer County's parks, either at offices or through self-serve kiosks — 49,671 for the sites in the Carter Lake District, which is a 17 percent increase over 2016, 90,064 at Horsetooth Reservoir, a 16 percent increase, and 12,623 at Hermit Park, a 51.7 percent increase.

Hermit Park did open a new 3.25-mile section of trail last year, but Chris Fleming, an operations manager with the natural resources department, attributes the huge jump in visitation simply to the beauty and overall experience at Hermit Park.

"The secret is out," Fleming said. "People have discovered Hermit Park. It's no longer this hidden gem of Larimer County."

More people are visiting Estes and nearby Rocky Mountain National Park and are discovering and returning to Hermit Park with visitation increasing on weekdays as well as the already busy weekends, she said.

A day pass is required for county parks, but not for most of the open spaces. Horsetooth Mountain Open Space is the exception, where 50,163 passes were sold, a 24 percent increase.

Brink attributes all the increases to population growth in the area as well as the customer service and amenities offered at the Larimer County sites, which are growing in popularity through repeat business and word of mouth.

"People are really into this healthy and active lifestyle," said Brink. "They're getting out and going hiking and paddleboating and camping. I see it as a positive thing."

Plus, he said, many of these parks are in close proximity to Loveland, Fort Collins and other cities and towns, which make them convenient on weekdays as well as weekends.

"In 20 minutes, you can get to a really nice outdoor location, even after a full shift," Brink said.

District manager Dan Rieves said that high water levels at the reservoirs as well as a strong economy also are factors in the record numbers in 2017.

"It's also a function of the economy," said Rieves. "When the economy is good, people are more apt to have a payment on a camper or a boat again."

And, he added, "the whole area is growing."

The record number of camping nights occurred without any new campsites added into the Larimer County system.

However, next season, the county is adding 21 new sites, a full second loop, into the South Shore campground at Carter Lake. A \$1 million project to revitalize and refurbish the campground on the south end of the lake and add the new loop is nearly complete, and the new campsites will open in April.

In fact, the new loop was opened for camping reservations just over a week ago. And Rieves is sure some of the sites are booking already.

Larimer County allows campers to reserve sites up to 180 days in advance, and many of the popular sites are already booking up on popular and holiday weekends through the summer. People track the 180 days and book sites as early as possible, according to Larimer County officials.

"If you want to get in any of the areas, especially during the peak times and holidays," Fleming added, "you have to do that 180 days out."

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