

ECOLOGICAL HEALTH



ECOLOGICAL HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Boulder County owns or oversees more than 98,000 acres of open space, conserving natural, cultural and agricultural resources and providing public uses that reflect sound resource management and community values. This is in partnership with local, state, federal and private entities that manage an additional 109,600 acres of federal land and 53,600 acres of open space and public land in the cities of Boulder, Longmont, Louisville, Lafayette, Ward, Denver and Gold Hill.

Preserving and restoring natural resources benefits the public and the environment. Boulder County purchases land in two ways: Through outright acquisition or with conservation easements. This ensures the land will remain an ecologically viable habitat for wildlife and plants and remain free from urban development. In addition to purchasing open space, Boulder County started restoring grasslands on unproductive agricultural land over 15 years ago and continues to expand these efforts.

Moreover, Boulder County and our municipal partners enhance stream or riparian habitats, given most wildlife use our stream corridor habitats during their lives and healthy riparian areas also protect water quality. In addition, fire suppression, overgrazing and climate change have all impacted the health of forests in Boulder County. Reintroducing disturbances, like thinning trees or prescribed fire, help improve forest health. Finally, trails

provide people an opportunity for improving their health and well-being, enjoying the outdoors, and connecting with the natural world. Boulder County takes pride in maintaining more than 100 miles of trails, bringing our community outdoors to appreciate Colorado landscapes.

Sustainability Success!

OPEN SPACE

Open space protects habitat for naturally occurring ecosystems and their native wildlife populations. Open space also contributes to our community values by conserving natural, cultural, and agricultural resources, and by supporting a strong economy. Open space can help our economy by increasing property values near open space, improving regional economic performance by attracting quality workers for area businesses, increasing space for bike paths and other active transportation options between cities, and infusing local and tourist dollars into outdoor recreation activities (over \$10 billion annual impact to Colorado's economy). A significant part of the economic engine of Boulder County can be attributed to the value of working, living and playing in the same area. Boulder County Open Space contributes to this high "quality of life" and creates a community that values all benefits derived from preserving and utilizing open space.

ECOLOGICAL GOAL

Ensure healthy and vibrant ecosystems that sustain all naturally occurring species, along with our human population

INTERNAL

TARGET 1

Preserve and restore grasslands, open space and forested lands

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1
Preserve an additional 1,500 acres of open space by the end of 2015

STRATEGY 2
Continue restoration of 1,800 acres of converted grasslands and identify additional grassland acres to be restored annually in the Parks and Open Space (POS) Capital Improvement Plan

STRATEGY 3
Restore 400 additional acres of forest land by 2015

STRATEGY 4
Thin trees along county roads to reduce hazard trees and create fuel breaks

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 5
Identify additional grassland and open space areas to restore by 2020

STRATEGY 6
Restore an additional 1,000 acres of forested lands by 2020

STRATEGY 7
Preserve 5,000 acres of suitable prairie dog habitat on county open space

INTERNAL

TARGET 2

Restore riparian habitat on Boulder County properties

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1
Restore one to three riparian areas annually

INTERNAL

TARGET 3

Maintain existing Boulder County trails and add additional miles of trails

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1
Maintain all existing Boulder County trails

STRATEGY 2
Identify trails to be built in the POS capital improvement plan

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 3
Identify additional trails to construct by 2020

INTERNAL

TARGET 4

Include forest health in the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Resurrect and completely update the Mountain Element of the 1978 Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP) (goals, policies, text and maps); focus new emphasis on forest health maintenance and restoration, living in mountainous ecosystems, wildfire mitigation, limiting development in forested areas, and other considerations

EXTERNAL

TARGET 5

Increase the number of acres of healthy forests in Boulder County

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Plan and implement landscape-scale forest treatments

STRATEGY 2

Improve rural slash and debris removal program

STRATEGY 3

Share data and mapping for forestry

projects across fire protection districts and governments

STRATEGY 4

Create a low-interest loan program for residents to treat their forests around their homes

STRATEGY 5:

Maintain healthy in-stream flows as part of riparian restoration efforts

All fire-fuel reduction measures will be science-based and focused in the wild-land urban interface.

EXTERNAL

TARGET 6

Expand education and outreach on forest health

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Present hands-on education, offer workshops, provide site visits and disseminate forest health information to private residents

EXTERNAL

TARGET 7

Increase the percentage of mountain residents with effective fire mitigation around their homes

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Provide private landowners a means to dispose of their wood

STRATEGY 2

Create and expand the use of community forestry sort yards, chipping grants and other tools

STRATEGY 3

Expand utilization of material collected in sort yards

EXTERNAL

TARGET 8

Ensure that land use decisions follow smart growth principles, including concentrating urban development within or adjacent to existing urban areas and preserving the rural character of the county

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Limit and manage development in the forested areas of Boulder County to protect those lands and resources from fragmentation and other associated impacts

> For a full list of strategies and descriptions of these strategies, please see BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org.



A group of citizen activists in the 1970s can be credited with the foresight to plan for our future. They realized that unplanned growth could forever alter the natural ecological environment, thus changing the landscape of Boulder County. This realization was the impetus for comprehensive land-use planning. The original Boulder County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1978, set the stage for shaping our landscape today by defining desirable growth and launching an open space protection program. The county has followed this plan by creating agreements with municipalities to outline community boundaries, purchasing open space and directing land uses to appropriate areas.

Today in Boulder County you can see preserved range lands and working farms; protected forest, riparian and grassland ecosystems that host myriad wildlife; multiple-use trails; and urban buffers. Urban development is adjacent to urban areas, and rural areas remain vibrant. Rare or endangered animals, like the burrowing owl, have places to nest. Soaring eagles are more plentiful in our skies. Forests protect our water sources, and lands that were once degraded are now home to native plants and animals. In total, the county has preserved almost 100,000 acres of land from future development.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Conserve and Protect Colorado's Land and Abundant Natural Resources

Colorado's environment is a singular component of its quality of life. Recognizing this, the state and its local government partners have developed a host of public policy and programmatic initiatives designed to conserve and protect Colorado's land and natural resources. Examples include: The Conservation Easement Tax Credit, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, America's Great Outdoors Initiative, and Great Outdoors Colorado. Boulder County will continue to support and use these tools to protect our local environment.

Support Full and Ongoing Funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program

The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program was established by Congress in 2009. The program encourages collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes on federal lands and supports up to 50% of the restoration treatment costs. In 2011, Colorado was awarded funding for two collaborative projects, including the Front Range Roundtable project, which has been approved for funding for 10 years, pending annually appropriated funding.

Support Legislative Efforts to Promote Wildfire Mitigation in Communities at Risk for Wildfire

Recent wildfires in Boulder County and across the state have reinforced the need for collaborative landowner and intergovernmental participation in mitigation efforts in the wildland urban interface. In particular, Boulder County supports legislative efforts that promote:

- Forest health projects that improve forest conditions, reduce fuels for fire, and create fuel breaks and safe escape routes
- Increased homeowner participation in creation and maintenance of defensible space and safe home ignition zone
- Increased use of ignition-resistant building materials in residential construction
- Intergovernmental coordination before, during and after a wildfire to reduce the risk of wildfire and ensure public safety and effective management during a wildfire
- Limit and manage development in the forested areas of Boulder County to protect those lands and resources from fragmentation and other associated impacts

A close-up photograph of a person's hands planting a small green seedling into the soil. The person is wearing blue jeans. The soil is dark brown and appears to be in a garden or field. The seedling has several green leaves and a small root system. The person's hands are positioned to hold the seedling steady as it is placed into a hole in the soil.

TAKE ACTION

Boulder County has a variety of volunteer opportunities for anyone interested in open space. You can spend a few hours collecting native seeds or adopt a trail to clean up regularly. You can help restore forests or monitor wildlife or weeds. Your organization could become a partner and bring a group out to open spaces a couple of times a year to help on various projects. During the past five years, Boulder County Parks and Open Space has doubled our volunteer hours and expanded opportunities for you to have a hand in preserving this community treasure. Join us, and help define the future for the next generation! BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org