

**DENVER WATER V. BOULDER COUNTY SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT  
SECTION 5.1 “LAND PRESERVATION”**



**Gross Reservoir Community Land Preservation  
Survey Results**

**Community Meetings Held:**

**May 18 (Virtual) and May 21 (Nederland), 2024**

**SURVEY CONDUCTED APRIL/MAY 2024**

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# Survey Overview

Section 5.1 of the [Denver Water vs. Boulder County Settlement Agreement](#) provides \$5.1 million to Boulder County to acquire fee properties, conservation easements, or trail corridors for land preservation. Section 5.1 was included in the Agreement because Boulder County was concerned about the inundation of forested land and the removal of trees associated with the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project.

In spring 2024, Boulder County designed and released a survey to collect community input on how the county might spend the \$5.1 million allocated via the *Denver Water vs. Boulder County Settlement Agreement*. The survey requested feedback exclusively from Boulder County residents impacted by the Denver Water Gross Reservoir Expansion (GRE) Project (the map of the impacted area is available in Appendix A). Boulder County sought feedback from the GRE-impacted residents because the money was specifically allocated to alleviate impacts from the Denver Water Project. (Note: Boulder County taxpayer funds are not part of the \$5.1 million fund provided in the Settlement Agreement).

The survey was distributed via a contact list Boulder County built to provide updates on the county's distribution of funds from the Settlement Agreement—which includes over 2,000 contacts—and targeted social media posts.

As part of the survey, Boulder County considered four potential uses for a parcel of land acquired using the \$5.1 million Land Preservation/Acquisition Fund. Survey respondents were encouraged to read the following definitions before filling out the survey:

- **HABITAT PROTECTION:** County open space land that is closed to public use. This type of purchase is generally used to protect wildlife and/or to expand a wildlife migratory corridor, protect a nesting area, or create a buffer between human development and wild spaces.
- **UNDEVELOPED (NON-MOTORIZED) PASSIVE RECREATION:** County open space land that is open to the public for passive recreation, but that has no amenities (such as trails). This type of purchase usually helps connect other publicly owned lands such as state or national forests or county or city open space properties. It can also be used as a potential future trail connector or to connect with a larger parcel of public land (e.g., the purchase of a privately held mining claim or other "inholding" surrounded by national forest land).
- **DEVELOPED (NON-MOTORIZED) PASSIVE RECREATION:** County open space land that is open to the public and has amenities associated with passive recreation. An example of this type of purchase is any trailhead or open space property managed by Boulder County Parks & Open Space that has amenities like a parking lot, toilets, designated trails, signage, etc. (Note: It is unlikely that the \$5.1 million would go far enough to purchase a stand-alone "park" for this type of use, but a parcel could be purchased adjacent to an existing county open space property to expand trail access or passive public recreation on that property.)
- **PARCEL FOR A PUBLIC SHOOTING RANGE:** Non-open space land that could be developed for use as a public shooting range. Establishing a public shooting range would enable the USFS to prohibit Recreational sports shooting on national forest lands within the Boulder Ranger District ([BRD map](#)), including the federal forest land and public trails around Gross

Reservoir. (Note: Boulder County is looking throughout the Boulder Ranger District to acquire land for the shooting range. We are not proposing that a parcel be acquired for this purpose near Gross Reservoir.)

**The results of the community survey are included in this report.**

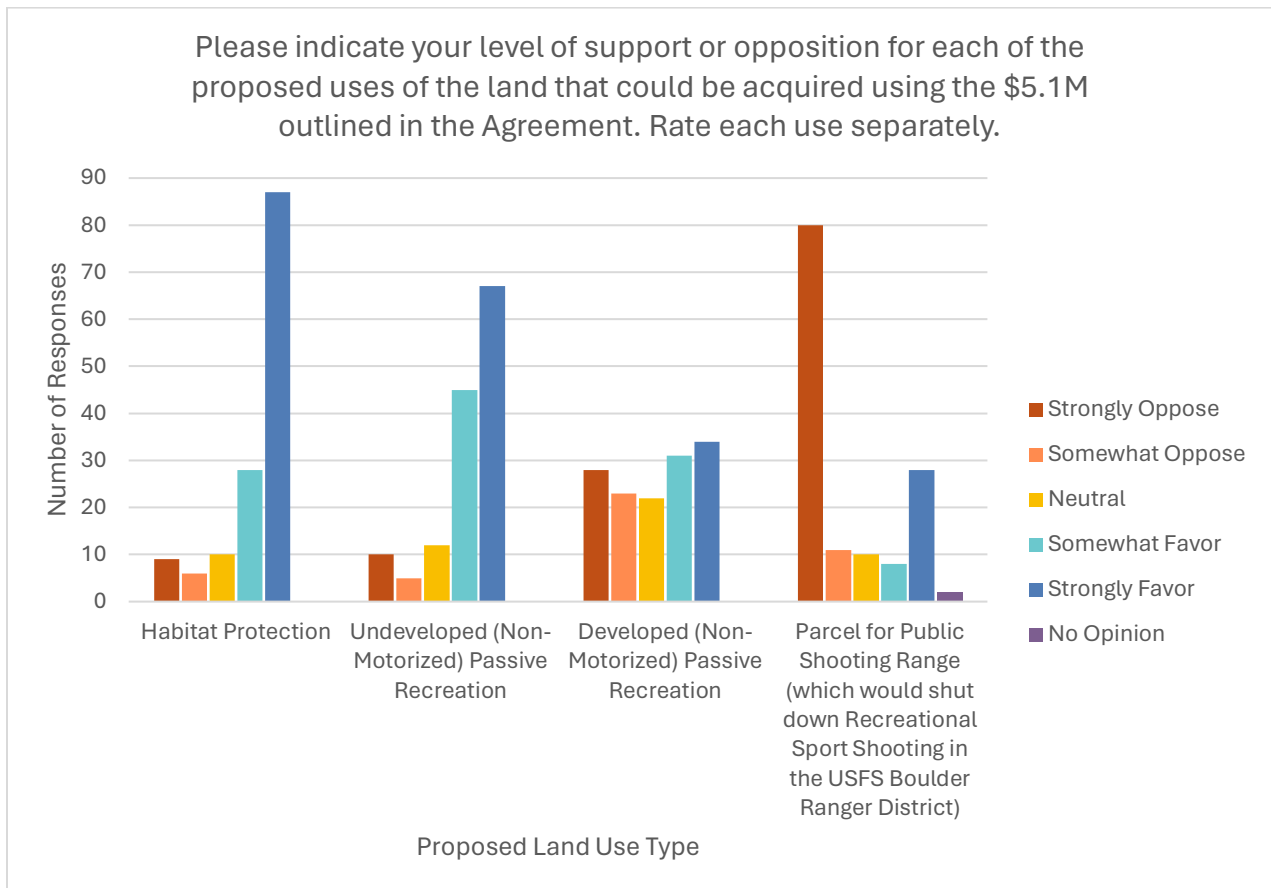
The Boulder County Commissioners will use the survey results to understand the community's preferences for how the acquired property might be used. The preferences shared via this survey will also help inform the county's strategy regarding what (specific) parcel/s to purchase.

(Note: Acquisition of land for any of the purposes above may take several years to complete because 1) properties that meet the qualifications above may not be currently available for sale, and 2) finding the right fit (and a willing seller) can take time.)

Peak Facilitation Group, a neutral third party, conducted the survey and assessed the results on Boulder County's behalf. Results are presented in aggregate form; individual responses were not shared with Boulder County.

## Survey Questions and Responses

**Question 1: Please indicate your level of support or opposition for each of the proposed uses of the land that could be acquired using the \$5.1M outlined in the Agreement. Rate each use separately.**

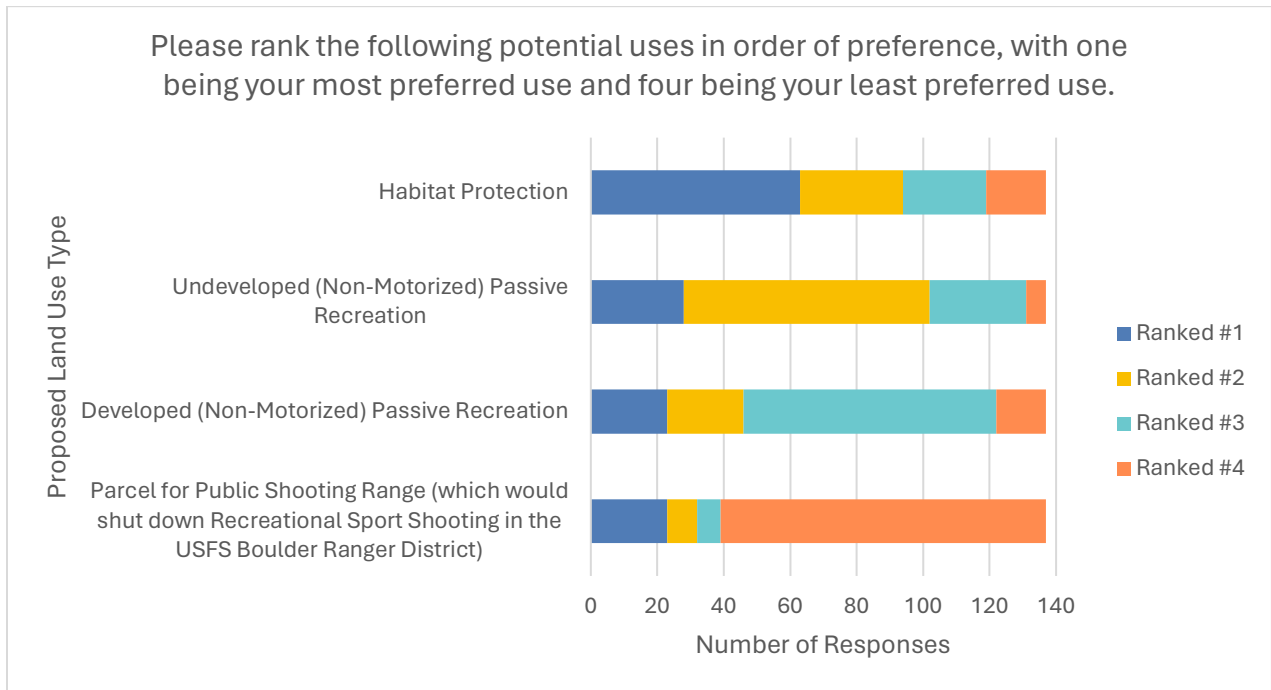


The results of Question 1 indicate a strong community preference for purchasing a parcel for habitat protection, followed by undeveloped (non-motorized) passive recreation. The responses indicate mixed results for developed (non-motorized) passive recreation and a strong preference in opposition to using the funds to purchase a parcel for a public shooting range, even with the explanation about how the shooting range—placed somewhere else in the county—would be used to shut down sport shooting in designated USFS Boulder Ranger District properties, including those surrounding Gross Reservoir.

The weighted average<sup>1</sup> of all responses produces the following quantitative ranking of the land use types:

Land Use Type	Weighted Average
Habitat protection	4.27
Undeveloped (non-motorized) passive recreation	4.11
Developed (non-motorized) passive recreation	3.14
Parcel for public shooting range	2.19

**Question 2: Please rank the following potential uses in order of preference, with one being your most preferred use and four being your least preferred use.**



<sup>1</sup> The weighted average is calculated by assigning a numerical value to the responses, with "strongly oppose" receiving a value of 1 and "strongly support" receiving a value of 5. The responses were then averaged, with a higher number indicating greater support among respondents. Respondents also had the option to indicate they had "no opinion" for any given land use type. Responses of "no opinion" were excluded from the averaging calculation.

The results of Question 2 indicate a community preference for purchasing a parcel for habitat protection and undeveloped (non-motorized) passive recreation. Respondents most frequently identified habitat protection as their top choice of the four land use types, followed by undeveloped (non-motorized) passive recreation. Developed (non-motorized) passive recreation was most commonly identified as respondents' third preference. Lastly, purchasing a parcel for a public shooting range was most commonly identified as respondents' last choice preference.

A complete accounting of the rankings is available in the table below.

Land Use Type	Ranked #1 (% Respondents)	Ranked #2 (% Respondents)	Ranked #3 (% Respondents)	Ranked #4 (% Respondents)
Habitat protection	46%	23%	18%	13%
Undeveloped (non-motorized) passive recreation	20%	54%	21%	4%
Developed (non-motorized) passive recreation	17%	17%	55%	11%
Parcel for public shooting range	17%	7%	5%	72%

### Question 3: Please provide any additional comments related to Boulder County's potential use of the \$5.1M Acquisition Fund.

Respondents provided comments on their preference for how Boulder County uses the \$5.1 million Acquisition Fund. The comments are categorized by land use type and summarized below.

#### ***Public Shooting Range Comments***

##### *Comments in Favor of Using Funds to Purchase a Public Shooting Range*

Those who supported using the \$5.1 million Acquisition Fund to purchase a public shooting range indicated that moving recreational shooting away from Gross Reservoir would mitigate the public safety and noise impacts from unregulated recreational shooting on US Forest Service property. The prohibition of unregulated recreational shooting in the Boulder Ranger District would make passive recreation safer while providing an opportunity for people to shoot without having to join shooting clubs. Some responses also stated that if funds are used to purchase a shooting range, the range should not be located in the foothills, mountains, or within audible distance of communities.

One respondent was concerned that a single shooting range would be insufficient as users would quickly overwhelm it. This demand indicates that more shooting opportunities should be supported and offered in the area.

##### *Comments Against Using Funds to Purchase a Public Shooting Range*

Those who indicated that they did not support the purchase of a parcel for a public shooting range cited noise disruptions, wildlife impacts, fire hazards, groundwater contamination, and safety concerns as reasons not to use funds in this way.

Some responses stated that the survey was unclear in describing where a potential public shooting range would be placed. Without this information, those respondents indicated that funds should not be used to purchase a shooting range, particularly if the shooting is audible to nearby communities. Similarly, some of the responses stated specifically that a shooting range near Gross Reservoir is

unacceptable and would compound upon the already negative impacts caused by the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project.

Additionally, some respondents identified that although they support establishing a public shooting range to prohibit recreational shooting in the Boulder Ranger District, they did not see the purchase as an appropriate use of funds since it does not address the specific effects of the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project.

### ***Habitat Protection Comments***

#### *Comments in Favor of Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Habitat Protection*

Those who commented that they favored using the funds to purchase a parcel for habitat protection cited the impact and disturbance of the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project on wildlife as reasons that they would like to conserve land for wildlife. Some responses stated that many people moved to the area for wildlife, forests, and mountains, so purchasing a parcel to conserve habitat is an appropriate use of funds. Other responses specified that any parcel purchased for habitat protection should be in forested mountain areas near Gross Reservoir (rather than Boulder Valley) because these areas are where impacts from the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project and the significant loss of the ecosystem occur. Some respondents requested that the purchase of a parcel for habitat protection be informed by wildlife data, such as the results of Colorado Park & Wildlife's recent elk monitoring project and information on the Winiger Ridge elk herd (and recently introduced moose).

#### *Comments Against Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Habitat Protection*

One response stated that purchasing a property that people cannot use does not mitigate issues caused by the expansion of Gross Reservoir. The respondent suggested using the money to repair damages to the area.

### ***Undeveloped (Non-Motorized) Recreation Comments***

#### *Comments in Favor of Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Undeveloped (Non-Motorized) Recreation*

Responses that shared support for purchasing a parcel for undeveloped recreation said that the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project impacts have already been disruptive in the community, so the purchased parcel should be used for passive use activities that do not add to those impacts. Some responses also cited the importance of outdoor recreation in promoting environmental awareness and protection.

#### *Comments Against Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Undeveloped (Non-Motorized) Recreation*

Some responses stated that additional undeveloped and closed dusk-to-dawn access to open space in Boulder County is not essential and will only produce additional traffic on overused roads.

### ***Developed (Non-Motorized) Recreation Comments***

#### *Comments in Favor of Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Developed (Non-Motorized) Recreation*

Several responses supported using the funds to purchase a parcel for developed recreation and provided suggestions on specific recreation uses. Those suggestions included:

- Picnic areas (with appropriate bear-proof trash containers)

- Multi-use trails for mountain biking, hiking, and equestrian
- A multi-use single-track system that connects the Walker Ranch Meyers Homestead to the Twin Sisters Peak Area
- An expansion of trails at Walker Ranch to include the fire-burned hillside and areas behind Langridge Dike
- A trail that goes around the new perimeter of Gross Reservoir for jogging, walking, and biking
- Motorized recreation trails
- Hiking trails
- Equestrian trails
- Dispersed camping
- Developed campsites
- Toilet facilities at the Crescent Park Trailhead
- Expansion and improvement of the picnic table area of Walker Ranch Loop Trail

Some respondents indicated that any newly developed recreation should focus on those most affected by the Gross Reservoir Expansion Project.

*Comments Against Using Funds to Purchase a Parcel for Developed (Non-Motorized) Recreation*

Some respondents indicated that they did not support using funds to purchase a parcel for developed (non-motorized) recreation as newly developed recreation will increase traffic and noise, and their preference is to keep the area as natural and quiet as possible. One response cited concerns that new camping invites illegal campfires and increases wildfire risk. Another response said that any newly developed recreation should not interfere with existing recreation access.

***Other Comments***

Other responses expressed other ways to use the funding. Those suggestions include the following:

- Purchase easements alongside Flagstaff Road for pedestrian sidewalks for walkers and bikers, as fast cars on Flagstaff Road are putting pedestrians in danger.
- Purchase easements alongside Flagstaff Road near Green Mountain West trailhead for a parking lot, which would help alleviate the dangerous parking situation.
- Fix dirt roads (e.g., Gross Dam Road, 68J, North County Road) for fire evacuation routes and safe passage.
- Fix and maintain infrastructure that already exists in the area.
- Build a train stop from Denver to Gross Dam, a historical train stop in the area.
- Improve signage that clarifies recreational versus private properties to prevent visitors from wandering through private backyards.
- Improve the grounds of local schools (instead of building more redundant parks).

Some responses shared areas to consider for land purchase, including:

- Coal Creek Canyon
- Land adjacent to Walker Ranch and Gross Dam Road
- The foothills and mountain areas (rather than the plains of Boulder County) since the mountain residents and recreationists are losing public lands.

One response indicated that they would like to see a proposal of possible parcels before they rate the potential land use types.

Some comments shared concerns on whether there will be effective management and enforcement of the prohibition on recreational shooting in the Boulder Ranger District and other developed recreation uses, especially if the \$5.1 million is only for the purchase of land.

Some responses stated that the funding should not be used for parking, which would attract more visitors unless that parking is developed specifically for a public shooting range.

**Question 4: Please provide your address below to verify your residency in the impacted area (see below). We will only use your address to verify residency.**

Addresses were compiled and used to verify residency. Responses from addresses outside the impacted area were removed from the results analysis. A total of 141 responses were deemed to come from valid households in the Gross Reservoir community.

**Question 5: Are you aware of any properties that might be available for sale that match any of the four uses described above? If so, please provide details on the property and a contact name/number so that a Boulder County staff member can follow up with you. Contact information and property details provided will only be shared with Boulder County.**

Responses were compiled and shared with Boulder County staff. Responses were not publicly shared to avoid pricing speculation or influence potential real estate negotiations.

**Question 6: Please provide an email address if you're interested in receiving the results of the survey.**

Emails were compiled into a contact list. This report was distributed to those who indicated they would like to receive the results of the survey.

## **Community Meeting Comments**

Boulder County held two community meetings to share the results of the land preservation survey. The meetings occurred on Saturday, May 18, from 10:30 am to 11:30 am and on Tuesday, May 21, from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm. The first meeting was held virtually, and the second occurred at the Nederland Public Library.

The agenda for the meetings was as follows:

- 1) Review the results of the Gross Reservoir Area Community Survey
- 2) Presentation by Boulder County Parks & Open Space Land Acquisition Staff
- 3) Q&A with Boulder County staff and residents
- 4) Next Steps



During the meeting, community members provided additional input on how Boulder County should spend the \$5.1 million land preservation fund from the *Denver Water vs. Boulder County Settlement Agreement*. The additional comments are summarized below.

- Boulder County should consider long-term management and maintenance costs when purchasing a new property.
- Boulder County should consider buying in-holdings to prevent fragmentation and protect habitat.
- Boulder County should continue to keep the Gross Reservoir contact list updated as they move through the process of acquiring a new property.
- The funding should not be spent on purchasing any house lots.

# Appendix A – Impacted Area Map

