



Clear Creek County Open Space Annual Report 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Clear Creek County Open Space Commission (OSC) is tasked with presenting an Annual Report of its activities during the previous year. This Report will describe various management projects that have occurred and report on the acquisitions made by the County and its support for the Town of Silver Plume's purchase of the Taylor Kennedy Mining Claims.

When the voters of Clear Creek County passed the ballot initiative creating the Open Space Program and the Open Space Commission (OSC) in 1999, they defined its mission. The mission of the Clear Creek County OSC is *to preserve and maintain the County's unique character and natural environment by protecting our streams, woodlands, meadows, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, prominent vistas, geologic features, and cultural resources to enhance the quality of life for residents and the enjoyment of the outdoors for both residents and visitors.* In 2022, the OSC developed a tag line to capture the goal of the Open Space Program as: **PRESERVE, PROTECT, ENJOY**, which is now be found on our signs

The Clear Creek County Open Space Program is funded by the Open Space Trust Fund. It was established in 1999 by a vote of the Clear Creek County voters; it authorizes a one mil tax to be collected and placed in the Open Space Trust Fund. Initially, distribution of the funds was allocated 75% land acquisition and 25% management. In 2010, the voters changed the allocation to 60% land acquisition and 40% management. Management includes any activity not associated with the purchase of land. Planning efforts, facility construction, and maintenance are paid for from the Management category. In addition to the Open Space Trust Fund, the Open Space Program has successfully received grants from organizations such as Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife (CPW), History Colorado, Denver Regional Council of Government, Jefferson County Open Space, and Gates Family Foundation.

Since its inception, the Open Space Trust Fund has been used to buy or has received by donation about 2,582 acres. In addition, the BOCC has designated 2,785 acres of former Bureau of Land Management lands, often called "County Lands" or Recreation and Public Purposes Lands (RP&P) as Open Space. The OSC currently oversees 5,367 acres. (See Appendix B Clear Creek County Open Space Properties (2025) for a listing of the properties. Maps showing their location are available on the County's web site. The link <https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/192/Open-Space> will take you directly to the web page.)



MANAGEMENT

Properties managed as Open Space can be found throughout the County. They vary in size, terrain, accessibility, and intensity of use. Open Space properties are managed by Public Lands staff which includes the Public Lands Manager, one half time Open Space Coordinator, a Trail Supervisor and two Trails Technicians.

Management activities include developing management plans, actual construction of trails and other facilities, and day-to-day maintenance (e.g., weed management, erosion control, trash collection, cleaning, and painting of fences, buildings, etc.). The Open Space Program, guided by the OSC in their advisory role, also spends time on efforts that relate to the “workings” of the Open Space Program which include submitting grant applications for funds, the management of grants and contracts received, facilitating the land acquisition process, and participation in County and State efforts that relate to open space.

Following is a summary of management activities undertaken in 2025:

- **Land Use Recommendations and Suitability Analyses Process (LUR) for Properties Acquired Before the Process was Initiated**– To provide more consistent processes for the management of Open Space designated lands, over the past couple of years, the OSC and staff developed a series of documents to be used for considering acquisitions and in the development of land management plans. When considering purchasing a property or group of properties, staff prepare a Land Use Recommendation and Suitability Analysis (LUR) and conduct a site visit if possible. This form documents the attributes of the property, evaluates the property against 12 criteria that reflect the Open Space Mission and identify primary goals for the property (e.g., Preservation/Conservation, Recreation, and Heritage/Habitat). This analysis is presented to the OSC and, if they recommend that the BOCC purchase the property, to the BOCC. If they approve the acquisition, the LUR guides the development of a Land Management Plan when that is undertaken. If the property is small or remote, development of a Land Management Plan may not be done for many years. The OSC and staff are focusing their efforts to develop Land Management Plans on areas that are seeing significant use and/or impacts. To date, these are Alvarado Open Space, Sheep Keep, Floyd Hill Open Space, Alps Mountain, and Geneva Basin Iron Fen. For the other properties without a Land Management Plan, the LUR provides management guidance.

Early in 2025, the OSC and County staff acknowledged the value of having LURs in the acquisition process and recognized the need to have LURs for the properties that had



been acquired since the creation of the Open Space Program in 2000. The OSC decided to undertake the task of drafting LURs for all of these properties, lumping them together in “regional” groups. Eight LURs were drafted, approved by the OSC, presented to the BOCC and approved. These are Alvarado Open Space Park, Stevens Gulch/Waldorf Basin, Geneva Basin Iron Fen, Mill Creek/Arrastra, Philadelphia Mill Site, Lawson Whitewater Park, Jennie Mining Claim, and the Sheep Keep. Work will continue in 2026 with the expectation that they will be completed and approved by the OSC and the BOCC by the end of the year.

- **Site visits with BOCC**– With a new BOCC in place, the OSC invited them to visit several Open Space managed properties to experience what they offer the public and the values they protect. The BOCC joined the OSC to visit Floyd Hill Open Space, Stevens Gulch, and Geneva Basin Iron Fen. The three visits showed them the variety of lands.

They started with one easily accessed and heavily used by hikers and cyclists (Floyd Hill Open Space Trailhead off of Highway 40 and the Oxbow Trailhead in Clear Creek Canyon). These areas see heavy use due to their proximity to the Front Range.

On the second site visit to Stevens Gulch, they saw a more remote landscape with steep mountainsides with a heavily used trail in the valley used by 15,000-20,000 hikers per year who climb Grays and Torreys, two 14ers. Most of the land owned by the County is very steep and provides the backdrop for the trail users. Usage tends to stay on the trail which is on the Arapahoe Roosevelt National Forest.

On the third site visit, they visited Geneva Basin Iron Fen, a designated Colorado Natural Area, up in Geneva Basin in the southwest corner of Clear Creek County, that is a very fragile ecosystem. It is harder to access and sees significantly less use. It was observed that the area is receiving more use and due to the fragility of the ecosystem more easily negatively impacted. The OSC and County staff are exploring options to reduce negative impacts such as building a viewing area.

- **Clear Creek Trail (aka Peaks to Plains Trail and as Clear Creek Greenway)**– All of the entities located along Clear Creek from the mountains to its joining the Platte River have been meeting to coordinate their efforts. As a part of the collaborative process, the Trail’s name has been changed to the Clear Creek Trail for its entire length. The logo also includes” From Peaks to Plains to reflect the previous name and its length. A consultant was hired to develop new logos and signage which is in the process of being approved by all the entities. Additionally, an IGA has been drafted to define how all the entities will work together. It is being reviewed by the various jurisdictions. Approval is expected in 2026.



- **Alvarado Open Space Park (aka Shadows Ranch)** – In 2025, having a completed Land Management Plan and an approved Master Plan for the Creekside portion of the Park, next steps focused on looking for possible funding sources. In addition, conversations were initiated with the Glass Family about establishing a memorial to their son at the Park. The first step was to determine if that was acceptable to the Family. Next steps, to be taken in 2026, involve figuring out how to incorporate the Glass Family’s ideas into the Concept 2 Botanical Focus. Asbestos abatement of the large cabin next to the Creek was completed which makes the building safe for demolition or rehabilitation. The CCC Trails Team has continued to maintain the existing trails. Usage has continued to increase at the Park. People can be seen using the Park for dog walking, swimming in the pond, ice skating on the pond in the Winter, fishing, etc.
- **Floyd Hill Open Space Park**— Floyd Hill Open Space Park is about 700 acres that lie between I 70 near the Floyd Hill Interstate exit north up over the ridge and down into the portion of Clear Creek Canyon within Clear Creek County. Currently, there are two main trailheads: the Oxbow Trailhead just upstream from Tunnel 5 and the Floyd Hill Trailhead off of Highway 40. Within the Canyon, there is about 1.5 miles of the Clear Creek Trail, an 8 ft wide concrete trail, easily accessed by people of all abilities. It connects with Clear Creek Trail in Jefferson County for an additional 1.75 miles. On the south side, the Floyd Hill Open Space Trailhead, accessed off of Highway 40, is a trailhead and trail system that provides hikers and mountain bikers with 11 miles of maintained multi-use trails and one bicycle downhill only trail called The Sluice. Due to its proximity to the many people who live on the Front Range, the trails continue to see heavy use. The CCC Trail Team maintains all of the trails except for The Sluice. Colorado Mountain Bike Association (COMBA) volunteers maintain it weekly to keep it in good riding condition. The parking lot is often full in the late afternoons and on weekends.

During 2025, efforts were undertaken to complete the finishing touches on the Trailhead Improvement Project. The kiosk was moved closer to the new trail entrance. As with any construction park project, as the area is used, issues were identified. Emerging erosion gullies were filled and efforts undertaken to mitigate future erosion. With the trail improvements in place, additional elements were identified to address how the “improved” trailhead is functioning. Large boulders at corners and along the edge of the lower parking lot are needed to protect the hillside. These will be installed in 2026.

- **Weed Management**—A significant element of the Floyd Hill Open Space Trailhead is the large meadow visible from I70. Each year, the County has Foothills Vegetation Management spray the meadow for various weeds such as cheatgrass, mullen and



thistle. As weed seeds are very durable, it is anticipated that weed management will be an on-going issue. In addition, as evidenced by the thistle plants seen near the trailhead parking lot, weed seed often comes in with visitors, either on their shoes or bike tires. Addressing weeds at the Trailhead will be a priority to keep them from spreading further. The current assessment is that with this repeated management action, the weeds are under control. The Open Space Program also monitors the various trailheads and trails for noxious weeds. Where feasible, efforts are undertaken to remove and control them.

- **Signage and Branding Plan for Clear Creek County Open Space Lands** – The OSC and staff hired Norris Design to develop a branding package that could be used on signs at Open Space managed lands. Norris staff developed two different concepts which were presented to the OSC for consideration. Both concepts used wood and metal as well as a grid to attach maps and rules signs. The OSC preferred one of the concepts but was concerned about costs of fabrication. Estimates for a kiosk sign were about \$10,000. The OSC expressed concern about the costs and wanted to explore whether the current sign designs in use could be combined with the proposed concepts such that the costs are significantly less. Staff is gathering information and developing options which will be considered in 2026.
- **CCC Trails Team Efforts** – In 2025, the County had a Trails Team composed of the Trails Supervisor and two Trail Technicians. They were responsible for about 100 miles of the County’s non-motorized multiuse trail network that exceeds 200 miles in length traversing canyons to alpine terrain. Most of the trail system is made up of historic trails, National Forest Trails (USFS Clear Creek Ranger District), the Greenway Trail, 35 miles of the Continental Divide Trail, four much visited 14’ers, and new trails including directional mountain biking trails. The County’s proximity to the many people who live on the Front Range as well as easily accessed by visitors from elsewhere has resulted in the trails seeing increased heavy use. Rather than driving further to the mountains and National Forests beyond Clear Creek County, people have discovered the various trails and recreational opportunities in Clear Creek County. The high-altitude environment, 8,000 to 14,000+ feet, with its extreme weather conditions also causes trail degradation on an on-going basis. The historic nature of many trails (150+ years old) requires significant repairs due to their age and as they were not built to be trails but to be access to mines and other uses. These factors result in the need to routinely maintain the entire Trail System yearly as well as undertake numerous repairs on the aging infrastructure to provide visitors an enjoyable and safe recreational experience and reduce natural resource degradation. Yearly, the CCC Trail Teams undertakes maintenance on many of the trails, rebuilding areas and bridges where needed and the completion of a number of restoration projects where historic retaining walls have



collapsed. Their ability to address the backlog of trail repair projects has been limited by the Team's small size.

- **Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Non-Motorized Trails Grant Application** – In 2025, the staff prepared and submitted a grant application to the CPW Non-Motorized Trails Grant Program for funding to support three additional Trail Technicians. Having additional staff would allow the CCC Trails Team to address large projects such as Union Pass where the heavy rains washed out a sizeable amount of the trail. Grant awards will be made in March 2026.
- **Management of Open Space Lands** – General “management” activities are undertaken by Open Space staff and the CCC Trails Team. These tasks include ensuring the trash is collected, toilets are cleaned and pumped, appropriate signage is installed, removing fallen trees, and other similar activities require on-going attention. With the development of more “facilities” such as Floyd Hill Open Space Trailhead, Lawson Whitewater Park, Philadelphia Mill Site, and the Clear Creek Trail in the Canyon, more time is being devoted to this part of management process. At three sites- Lawson Whitewater Park, Philadelphia Mill Site and the Game Check Station- the restrooms are eloos which are evaporative toilets. While these have been in place for over ten years, recently with increased usage, these facilities have experienced problems handling the waste. As a result, these facilities were closed and porta potties installed as a short-term solution. County staff are exploring what options are available to improve the functioning of these facilities.

In addition, throughout the year, staff address issues associated with right-of-way, driveway easements, investigating trespass events, illegal tree cutting, etc.

- **OSC Involvement in County Efforts** – Open Space staff and members of the OSC regularly participate in County efforts where Open Space manages lands are involved or nearby and/or our expertise in land management and recreation is relevant. These efforts include:
 - BOCC's effort to define the County's recreation goal;
 - County Rafting Program as a number of the put ins or take out points are on Open Space land; and,
 - Providing input on proposed regulations being developed by the Planning Department (e.g. camping regulations)



ACQUISITIONS

During this time period, the OSC worked on acquiring some unique land parcels that advance Open Space goals as well as assisting the Town of Silver Plume in purchasing some key mining claims.

- **Taylor Kennedy Mining Claims Purchase by Town of Silver Plume** – In 2025, the OSC recommended that the BOCC use Open Space Trust Funds to assist the Town of Silver Plume to purchase 353 acres across the face of Republican Mountain, accessed by the 7:30 Trail and adjacent to the 96 Jack Pine Mining Claims the Town purchased in 2022. The OSC recommended that the BOCC assist the Town in purchasing these mining claims as they are a key portion of the scenic viewshed seen by millions who drive by on I70. The Town and owners arrived at a mutually agreed upon price of \$875,000. Silver Plume sought this purchase to keep this land in public ownership.

The following reasons were identified as the reasons that Clear Creek County should financially assist the Town with this purchase as they had with the Jack Pine Mining Claims:

- Mining claims are within the National Historic Landmark District;
- Protects a critical backdrop seen from I70;
- The claims all have MR 1 development rights, residential development would eliminate multi use and the mining history;
- Development would have a severe negative impact on the Town of Silver Plume;
- 730 Trail goes through the Claims; and,
- Includes historical artifacts of Clear Creek's mining history.

The OSC supported the idea of using Open Space Funds to support the Town's purchase. They made that recommendation to the BOCC who agreed. As of the end of 2025m the Town had successfully raised funds from a variety of sources including foundations and individuals with the goal of completing the purchase in early 2026.

- **Donations of Mining Claims** – One of the ways the County has acquired Open Space parcels over the years has been through donations. Often the County is approached by landowners about possible donations of land to the County to be managed as Open Space. These parcels are evaluated as to their location and open space values before the OSC recommends to the BOCC that the County accept the donations. In 2025, the County was offered the Jennie Mining Claim. Located north of Saxon Mountain, the 5.16



acres mining claim is surrounded by National Forest on a fairly steep hillside. Using the LUR, the staff reviewed the claim and its surrounding using the 12 evaluation criteria and found that many were met and concluding that it would be a good idea to recommend that the donation be accepted. The OSC recommended that the BOCC accept the donation. The BOCC directed staff to pursue the donation. The donation was accepted in January 2026.

PLANS FOR 2026

As we look ahead to 2026 in terms of projects and workload, the following projects were identified:

- Floyd Hill Open Space Trailhead Finishing Touches
- Sign Plan for Open Space Properties
- Build a boardwalk at Geneva Basin Iron Fen
- Draft the Sheep Keep Land Management Plan
- Complete LURs for Open Space Properties Acquired Prior to Use of the Form

Other on-going activities will continue. In addition, ways to invite the public to explore Clear Creek County's Open Space will be identified and pursued. As always, staff and the OSC will respond to Open Space opportunities as they arise.