

**Clear Creek County  
Open Space Plan  
2024**





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## The Open Space Mission



*The mission of the Open Space Program is: Preserve and maintain our 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 residents and visitors*

### About this Plan

**This Open Space Plan guides Clear Creek County in its implementation of the Open Space Mission. It identifies the Essential Resources to Open Spaces and the Open Space Priorities for management.**



## Introduction

In 1999, the passage of a citizen-initiated ballot measure to support the acquisition and management of Open Space lands approved an “Open Space Property Tax,” a \$1 mil tax levy, with a bonding authority for \$1.5 million. In 2000, the BOCC established the Open Space Program and created and appointed members to the Open Space Commission (OSC) to advise the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on open space issues. In 2001, with the adoption of the Clear Creek County Open Space Plan Policies, the BOCC expanded the OSC role to include management of the County’s Open Space designated lands in addition to advising the BOCC.

The OSC approved an Open Space Plan in 2005 which outlined policies and priorities to guide their efforts. In 2021, the OSC decided it should update the Open Space Plan. The effort was undertaken to draft a new document which has gone through many iterations. This document is the result and incorporates the direction provided in Resolution R-22-77, adopted in December 2022, that established a Charter for the OSC and gave management of Open Space designated lands to the County Manager or his/her designee. The initial allocation of funds defined in the ballot measure was 75% for acquisition and 25% for management. In 2009, the voters of Clear Creek County approved a modification of the percentages to 60% for acquisition and 40% for management.

The membership of the OSC is 11 Clear Creek County citizens. Geographic distribution across the County is not designated in the Bylaws but an effort is made to get members who represent all areas of the County.

### **Open Space Lands**

Clear Creek County is composed of 76% public lands. Of those, 68% is National Forest managed by the US Forest Service. 2% is Open Space designated County lands.

Since its creation in 1999, the Open Space Commission has recommended the acquisition, through purchase, designation, or donations, of hundreds of acres of land. From the banks of Clear Creek to mid mountain forests, to land above timberline in the high mountain basins, there are over 7,500 acres of Open Space designated land in Clear Creek County

### **The Open Space Commission**

The role of the Open Space Commission as stated in Section I of the Open Space Charter is “to advise the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) on issues related to open space, parkland and recreation lands, including use of revenues from the Open Space Property Tax (OS Fund) and acquisition of interests in land. The OSC represents the interests of the voters and taxpayers of Clear Creek County in its advisory role to the BoCC”.

Section III of the Charter identifies the responsibilities of the OSC. The three primary responsibilities are:

- A. Leading the development of an Open Space Plan to be recommended to, and adopted by, the BoCC:
- B. Providing land management recommendations in accordance with the Open Space Plan:
- C. Advise the BoCC on land acquisition



## The Open Space Charter

**The Plan is Guided by the Open Space Charter** - The Charter elaborates on the responsibility to create an Open Space Plan, recalling areas of the objectives identified in the 2001 Open Space Plan Policies document adopted by the BOCC at that time. The OS Charter, Section III.A.1 states:

1. The Open Space Plan shall contain guidelines for development of Clear Creek County open space designated lands.
2. The Open Space Plan shall advance the following objectives:
  - a. To maintain the natural beauty and rural character of Clear Creek County and to protect environmentally sensitive areas;
  - b. To identify and plan for open space opportunities and to use open space as a design tool in helping to shape the patterns of growth within our County;
  - c. To use open space to protect and enhance the quality of life and enjoyment of the natural environment, and to preserve the rural character of the unincorporated areas of the County;
  - d. To protect areas with significant environmental, ecological, scenic cultural, or historic values;
  - e. To connect various parts of the County with a network of public and private open space, including trail corridors and passive recreation areas, where appropriate;
  - f. To act as general liaison with the BoCC and the general public relative to open space issues;
  - g. To encourage the private sector and governmental organizations to participate in open space preservation and trail development where such participation advances the goals of the Open Space Plan within Clear Creek County;
  - h. To serve as a public source of information for residents of Clear Creek County regarding open space lands and the plans for the protection and use; and,
  - i. To collaborate with staff to ensure that the Open Space Plan has clear deliverables and deadlines.

**The Open Space Plan Guides Planning and Prioritization** – The Open Space Plan identifies the resources present on the Clear Creek County Lands, acquired with Open Space funds, or donated, and/or designated as Open Space by the BOCC, that are protected for Open Space uses. Those resources can be distilled into six Essential Resources.

This plan also identifies six Open Space Priorities for managing land. These priorities guide the Open Space Commission in their stewardship of the Open Space Fund, and in the recommendations, they advance to the BOCC regarding Land Use and Land Management Planning.

The Open Space Commission is committed to advocating for the protection of the six Essential Resources, with Land Acquisition being a critical tool in that effort. The OSC also is committed to providing well-informed recommendations to the BOCC that support or advance the the six Priorities described below.



## Open Space Essential Resources

Essential Resources are the characteristics of land that define it and that can be identified as to its role in fulfilling the OS Charter, Mission and Priorities.

### Important Features and Viewscapes

*Landscapes within the County enable visitors and residents to enjoy a variety of vistas and/or explore a range of environments from canyon to tundra. Scenic byways and other roads ranging from I70 to two track mining roads and hiking trails allow visitors the ability to see the important features and vistas up close.*



### High Altitude Basins

*These basins contain fragile ecosystems with spectacular scenery, provide water and key wildlife and plant habitats as well as recreational opportunities;*



## Open Space Essential Resources

### Critical Habitat and Wildlife Corridors

*Throughout the County there are areas that provide key habitat and migration corridors for wildlife;*



### Cultural Resources

*Remnants of the mining heritage which shaped the County's lands and settlements can be seen throughout the County*



## Open Space Essential Resources

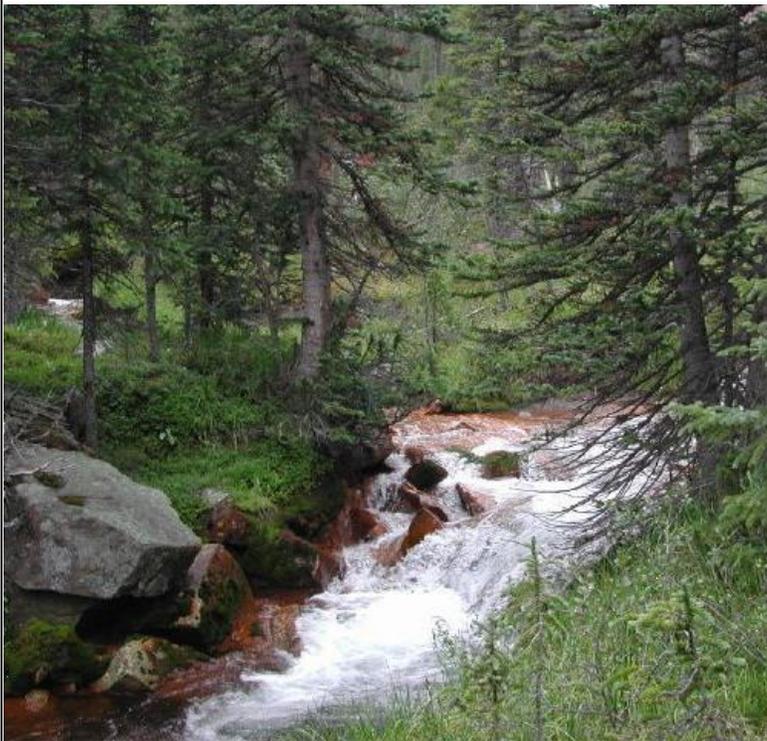
### Recreational Opportunities

*The public lands within Clear Creek County provide opportunities for sustainable nature-based active and passive recreational activities*



### Watershed Values

*Located at the headwaters of Clear Creek, the watersheds found within Clear Creek County including Clear Creek and its tributaries and wetlands, are critical for the viability of the ecosystems and for the many water users (Front Range and beyond) who rely on the watersheds for water for consumption and other uses*





## Open Space Plan Priorities

Using the Charter’s guidelines as well as the Mission Statement, the Open Space Commission has identified four Priorities that provide direction and constitute the core of the Open Space Plan. They are:

- Preservation (Preserve)
- User Education (Protect/Enjoy)
- Recreation (Enjoy/Protect)
- Community Engagement



### “Preserve, Protect, Enjoy”

Preserve Protect Enjoy, is the Open Space motto. It appears on Open Space park entrance signs. It was coined by Frank Young who passed away in 2023. Frank was one of the founders of the Open Space concept in Clear Creek County. It was his leadership and advocacy, that created the community support that passed the ballot measure, which created the Open Space Fund and led to the Open Space Commission and this Plan and all the benefits the community of Clear Creek County has gained from his work. It is fitting that he came up with this motto, Preserve, Protect, Enjoy, that these three words capture so much of what the Open Space Plan is really trying to do. It is a perfect overlay for the Open Space Priorities. Thanks to Frank for his vigilance, his leadership and his deep constant dedication to the lands of Clear

As decisions are made on acquisition and management of Open Space designated properties, the OSC will provide advice to the BOCC using these priorities as a guide. Central to the management of Open Space lands is the balancing of these priorities which will vary depending on the specifics of particular parcels or groups of parcels.



## Open Space Plan Priorities

### **Preservation (Preserve)**

- Actions to be undertaken to support the Preservation objective include:
- Monitoring the Condition of the Open Space Lands
- Protecting the Essential Resources found within Open Space
- Consider Conservation/Preservation as a primary use for land as part of every Acquisition process

### **User Education (Protect)**

- Inform and welcome the public and visitors/users of Open Space lands through high quality onsite information;
- Educate the public on the Open Space fund and how it benefits the community; and,
- Educate the public on responsible visitation and outdoor recreation.

**Recreation (Enjoy)** - Recreation is one of the main ways community members experience and enjoy public lands.

- Evaluating Open Space properties for appropriate recreation uses considering the implications for the essential resources;
- Increasing care and stewardship by providing opportunities for enjoyment, exploration and inspiration on Open Space land; and,
- Ensuring an accessible, sustainable safe trail system to enhance community connection with Open Space Lands.

**Community Engagement** - Recognize the importance of partnership and collaborative efforts that have supported and furthered Open Space efforts in the past and will be critical to future successes. Examples includes sources of funding as well as support in seeking grants, maintaining trails and facilities, and overall land management.

- Engage the community in decision making on Land Use and Project Planning;
- Engage the public through community strategies that highlight the experience of enjoying Open Space Lands;
- Engage the public by providing opportunities to gather their feedback; and
- Activate the community through a robust volunteer program.

**These Priorities, along with the Mission and Charter inform the acquisition, use and recommendations the OSC makes regarding OS designated lands. This plan informs the planning and management work collaboratively The OSC recommendations are strengthened by the Priorities and Essential Resources identified in the Plan.**



## Open Space Plan Implementation

The Open Space Plan Priorities, guided by the Mission, Charter and Essential Resources uses four main tools for implementation.

- Land Acquisition Recommendations
- Land Use Recommendations
- Collaborative Land Management and Project Planning
- Open Space Fund Budget Recommendations

### Land Acquisition Recommendations

When Open Space funds are used to acquire land, or lands become Open Space Designated, those lands extend the Open Space Mission and purpose by expanding the land that is protected by the Open Space Designation. Land Acquisition recommendations to the BOCC have successfully accounted for hundreds of acres of protected high alpine acres and sheep habitat and have provided the community with many beautiful places to hike and bike. Land Acquisition is a key tool in protecting each of the Essential Resources and is especially important in advancing the Open Space Priorities of Preservation and Recreation.

**Additional Background** - Initial efforts were primarily focused on acquisition of mining claims especially in high mountain basins and working with other County staff to have the BOCC designate various former BLM parcels to be retained as Open Space. Efforts continued to acquire key parcels that supported the key areas of focus identified in the Open Space Plan (e.g., Clear Creek Greenway, high mountain basins, wildlife habitat, etc.) A major acquisition was a portion (approximately 1,500 acres) of the Beaver Brook Watershed to protect it from development. The goal of the purchase was to ultimately sell it to the US Forest Service which owns the remainder of the Watershed. In 2009 about 900 acres was sold to the US Forest Service. Other examples of purchases are the Philadelphia Mill Site, Saw Mill Gulch, key parcels in Clear Creek Canyon needed for construction of the Clear Creek Greenway through the Canyon, Alvarado Open Space Park, and Floyd Hill Open Space.

### Implementation of this Plan

The Open Space Plan, as per Section xx.xx of the Open Space Charter is to be updated every 5 years. The OSC uses this Plan actively as a planning tool to guide the Land Use Recommendations, Land Acquisition work, as well as development and implementation of Land Management Plans. Also, with the on-going collaborative work they do with County Staff.



## Open Space Plan Implementation

### Land Use Recommendations

Land Use Recommendations are a key tool the Open Space Plan and Open Space Commission uses to implement the Open Space Plan, protect Essential Resources and ensure Open Space priorities continue to advance. Providing expertise on the best Open Space use for land both as it is being acquired and when it is being managed and/or developed ensure consistent responsible approaches are applied, protecting, and preserving the natural and cultural resources.

**Additional Background** - Land use recommendations inform the ongoing management that staff conduct to ensure day-to-day maintenance (e.g., trash collection, restrooms, weed management, monitoring for resource degradation) as well as larger efforts, such as removal and revegetation of unwanted roads or demolition of unwanted buildings, and improvement of trails, are taken care of in ways that are in keeping with the with land use vision established by the Open Space Plan.

### Collaborative Land Management and Project Planning

Property or Area Specific Land Management Plans, Project Plans and Annual Budget Planning in collaboration with staff are another primary way this Open Space Plan is implemented. Land Management Plans that elaborate on approved Land Use Recommendations are developed collaboratively. Project Plans are often the final outcome of Land Use Recommendations contained in a Land Management Plan if the Plan indicates development of amenities and trails as part of the vision of a property/area.

**Additional Background** - Open Space planning efforts led to the development and construction of on the Oxbow Trailhead and Trail Site Plan, contributed to the Clear Creek Greenway Plan, analysis of the archeology of the land around the Arrastra, Floyd Hill Open Space Trail Plan, etc. Funding for project construction often comes from Open Space Trust management funds. Open Space funded projects include 1.5 miles of Clear Creek Greenway in Clear Creek Canyon including the Oxbow Trailhead, Lawson Whitewater Park, Philadelphia Mill Site, Floyd Hill Open Space Park Trailhead and Trail System, and trails in various parts of the County.

Insert Photo of OSC engaged in planning work or a public meeting or something like that here



## Open Space Plan Implementation

### Open Space Fund Budget Recommendations

Each year, as part of the County budgeting process, and as informed by this Open Space Plan, County staff and the OSC collaboratively develop a project and work plan for the coming year. This process keeps annual work and project expenditures in line with the annual available revenues and provides the Open Space Commission with visibility into operations that allows the OSC to fulfill their responsibilities to advise the BOCC on the use of Open Space funds as well as their recommendations on acquisitions.

**Additional Background** - The one mil levy authorized by the Ballot Initiative initially provided the Open Space Program with approximately \$167,000 per year. Over time the 1 mil levy has generated as much as \$600,000 plus per year. The Open Space Trust Fund in 2024, is receiving approximately \$343,000. Through its 20 plus year existence, the Open Space Program has been very successful at leveraging its funding both for acquisitions and construction projects. Total grants of \$15,250,453 have been received with an outlay by the County of \$2,579,918. These funds have been used to purchase lands such as the 109 acres on Floyd Hill and approximately 71 acres in Clear Creek Canyon. On the construction side, grant funding has been used to build portions of the Greenway as well as facilities such as the whitewater structures at the Lawson Whitewater Park and the Philadelphia Mill site and miles of the Greenway Trail through Clear Creek Canyon.



## About Open Space Lands

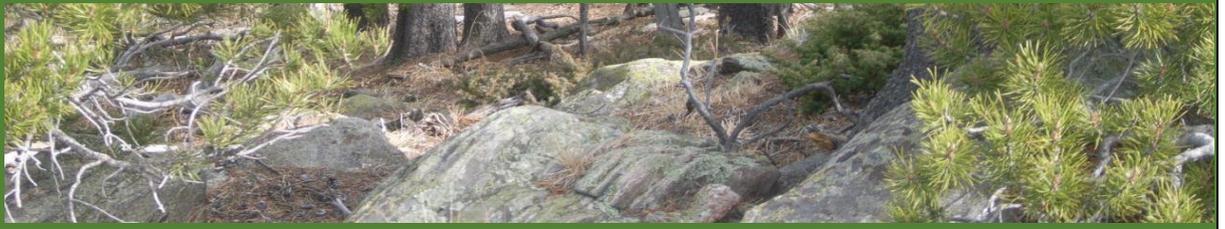
The Clear Creek County Open Space Program manages about 5,175 acres. Lands have been acquired in three main ways

1. Through purchase with Open Space Trust Funds (XXX of 5175)
2. Through donations or grants from entities such as Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) (XXX of 5175)
3. Through the Clear Creek County, Colorado, Public Lands Transfer Act of 1993 (Public Law 103) - a land transfer from the federal government. Just over 7000 acres of former BLM land was transferred to the County with this Act. Much of the land was conveyed to private ownership and other portions were transferred to the towns or other public entities. The County retain 3910 acres to manage as Open Space. (3910 of 5175)

To understand the variety of lands included in the 5,175 acres of Open Space in Clear Creek County, and the wide ranges of diversity in holdings, they are best viewed as individual lands or segments.

Open Space Map here

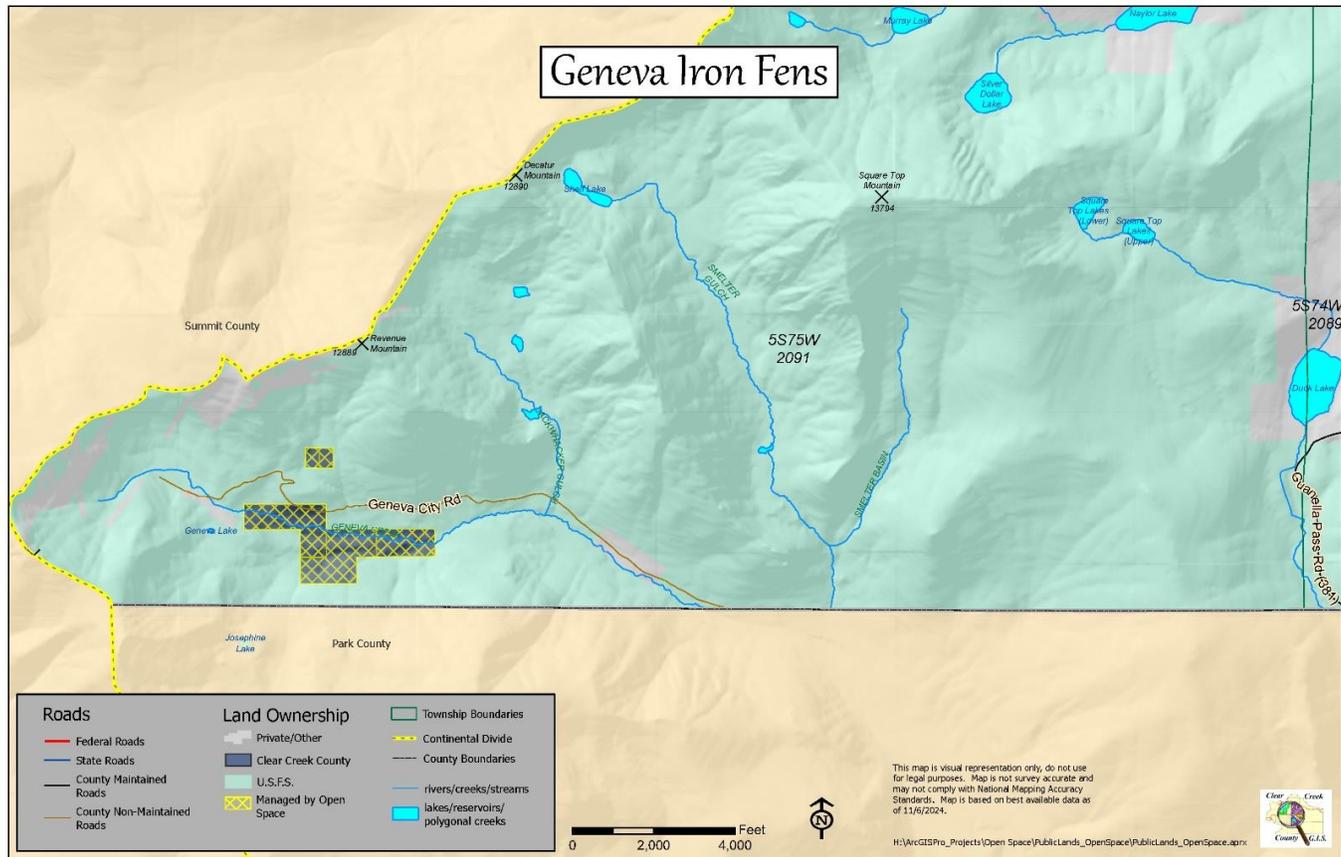




## About Open Space Lands

### Open Space Lands & Segments

#### Geneva Basin Iron Fens Open Space



The Geneva Basin Iron Fen Open Space is a group of parcels located at the far southwest corner of the County. This area is registered as a Colorado State Natural Area. This unique and noteworthy Open Space area is in the Geneva Creek Basin and is one of eight iron fens in Colorado and they are found nowhere else. Fens are an area of peat-forming wetlands. Iron fens are unique as due to the iron substrate, they are extremely acidic (pH3), and are high in minerals. This process produces limonite (iron saturated) ledges and terraces. The approximately 110 acres are five mining claims that were deeded to the County for open space. These parcels were acquired through purchase with Open Space Trust Funds and tax lien.

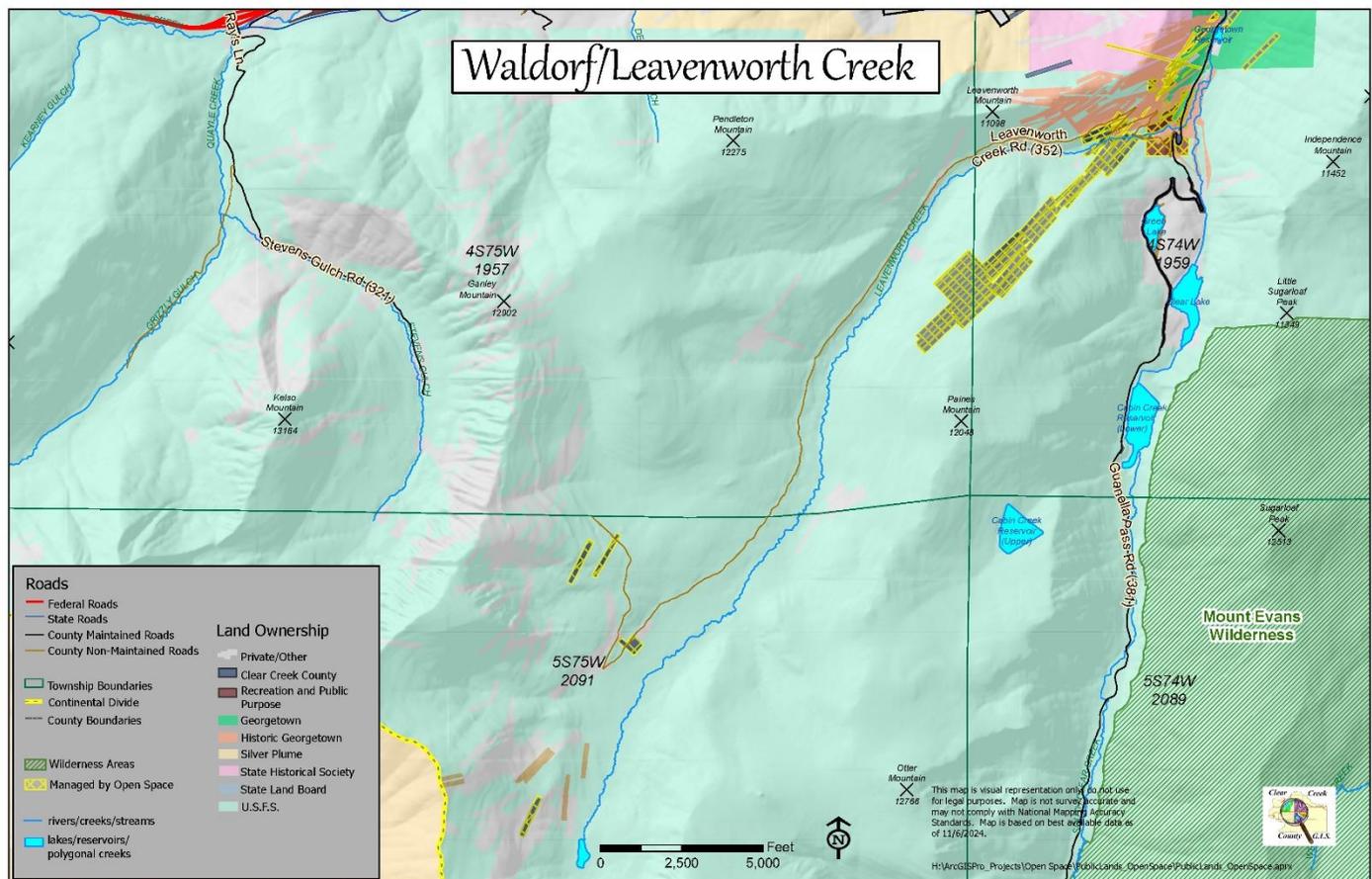
These parcels are a part of the Open Space system because of the uniqueness of the ecosystem. The area is managed to protect the ecosystem which includes Colorado's only known occurrence of Girgensohn sphagnum moss.



## About Open Space Lands

### Open Space Lands & Segments

#### Waldorf Basin Open Space



The Waldorf Basin Open Space is in one of the high mountain basins found in Clear Creek County and is within the Colorado designated Silver Heritage Area of Upper Clear Creek. The Waldorf Basin itself is located southeast of Georgetown accessed from Guanella Pass Road. It is part of the headwaters water source for Clear Creek. The majority of the Basin is owned by the Arapahoe/Roosevelt National Forest with many private claims intermingled. Waldorf Basin Open Space consists of a number of mining claims along Leavenworth Creek at the base of the Basin. Waldorf Basin Open Space also includes a few mining claims higher up in the Basin which are approximately 30 acres. Several were purchased and some were obtained via tax lien.

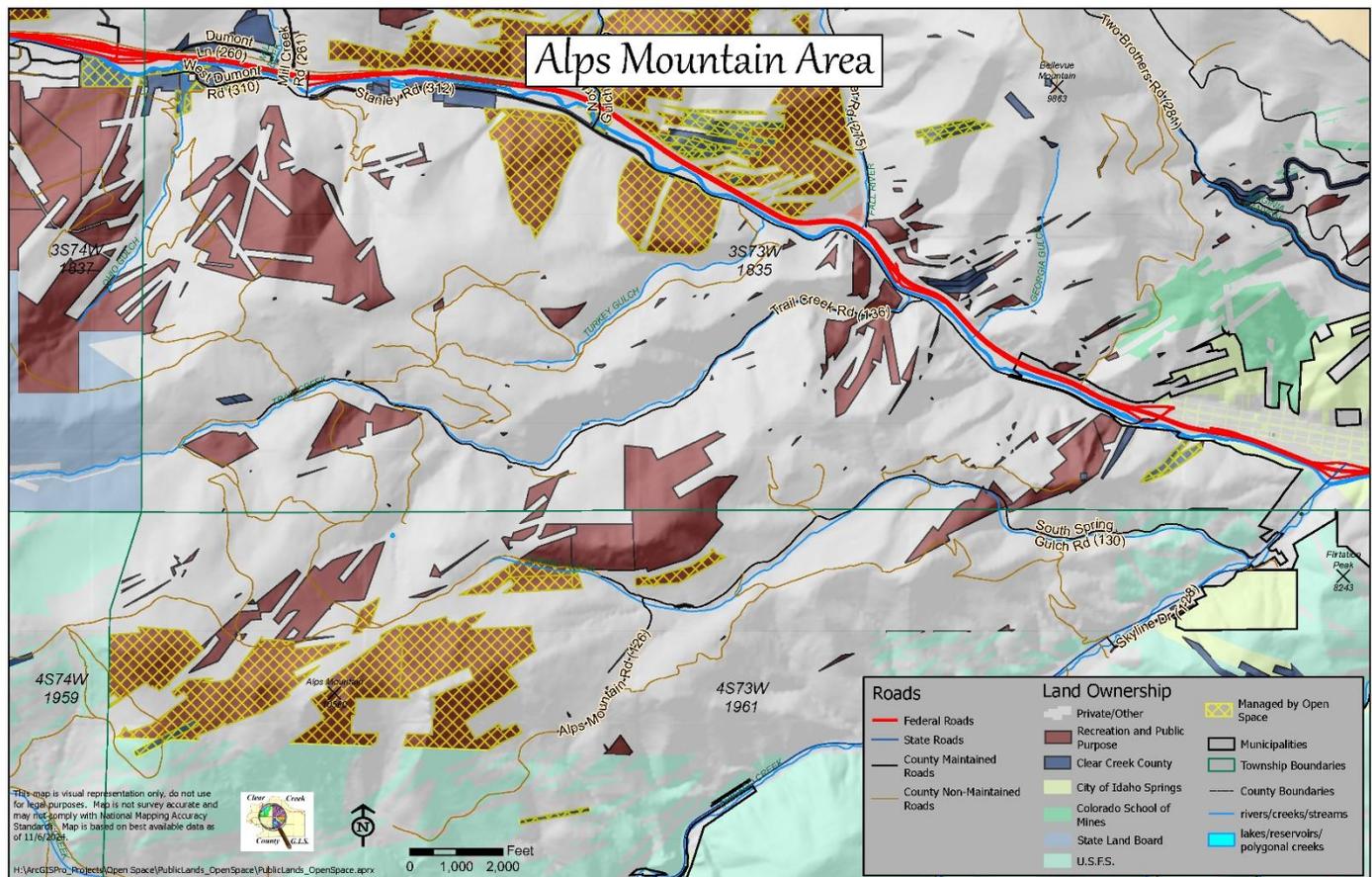
These claims were purchased to provide protection of the ecosystem, the viewshed, protect the watershed, and to facilitate management of recreation in the Basin.



## About Open Space Lands

### Open Space Lands & Segments

#### Alps Mountain Open Space



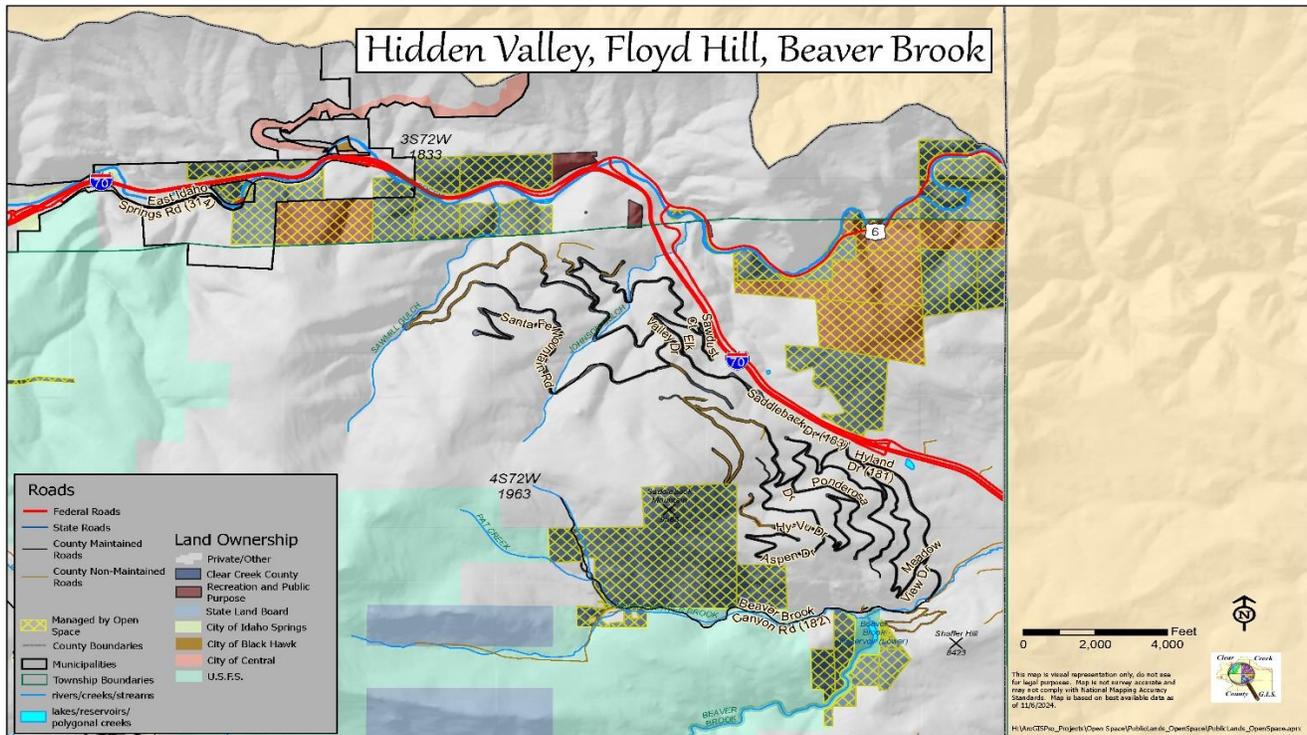
Alps Mountain is approximately 350 acres which is mostly former BLM land does include one purchased claim. It is predominately covered by forest. The Alps Mountain area provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife and an opportunity to explore relatively undeveloped acreage with incredible views from the ridgeline. The consideration for the acquisition were possible future recreation, ongoing habitat protection and viewshed protection.



## About Open Space Lands

### Open Space Lands & Segments

#### Hidden Valley, Floyd Hill, Beaver Brook Segment



**Hidden Valley Open Space Lands-** The Hidden Valley Open Space consists of several parcels from west of the I70 Veterans Memorial Tunnels (aka Twin Tunnels) east to the bottom of Floyd Hill. These lands include the Game Check Trailhead. Hidden Valley Open Space lands extend to the east of the I70 Hidden Valley Exit on both sides of the Interstate. These parcels were purchased with Open Space Trust Funds, to provide the location for the Clear Creek Trail (CCT) and protect wildlife access to the Creek.

**Floyd Hill Open Space Park** Floyd Hill Open Space Park includes a 10-mile multi-use trail system accessed from the Floyd Hill Trailhead, and the Oxbow Trailhead which provides access to the completed portion of the Clear Creek Trail (aka the Clear Creek Greenway) in Clear Creek County.

The Floyd Hill Trailhead is co-owned Jefferson County Open Space. The remainder of the Floyd Hill Open Space Park is a combination of former BLM land and acquired parcels using Open Space Trust Funds and grants, to protect the viewshed, provide Creek and trail access and wildlife habitat.

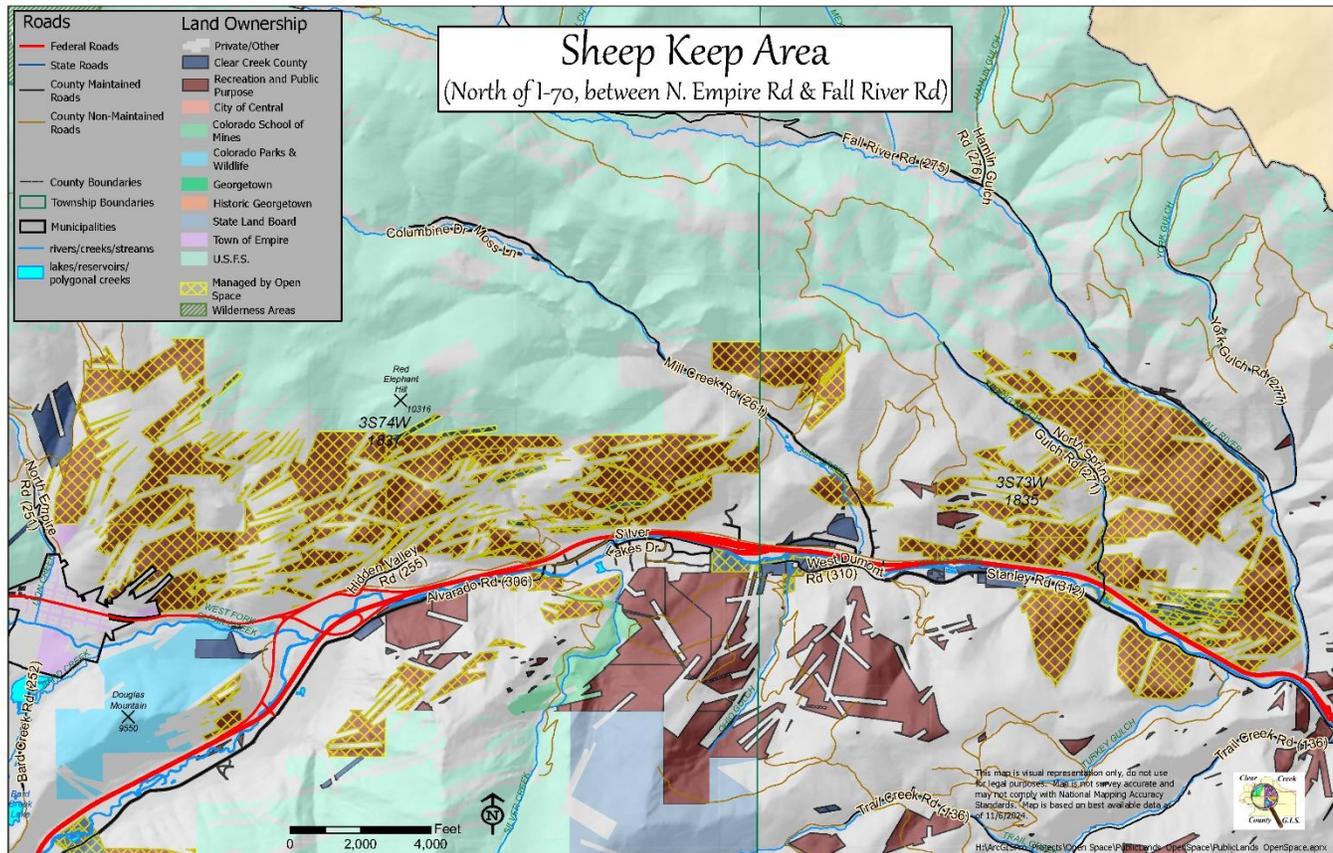
**Beaver Brook Open Space Lands –** The Beaver Brook Open Space is part of the Beaver Brook Watershed, 5,700 acres, located on the east side of Clear Creek County. Originally, managed for water by Golden, much of the land has been conveyed to public protected use, including 538 acres of Beaver Brook Open Space. Those 538 acres are found in two spots; near the Lower Reservoir and on the backside of Saddleback Mountain. Most of the Beaver Brook Open Space is steep and not easily accessible.



## About Open Space Lands

### Open Space Lands & Segments

#### Sheepkeep Segment



The Sheepkeep Open Space Lands are approximately 1,718 acres. It is predominately former BLM lands which were retained due to their importance as Big Horn Sheep habitat. The Sheepkeep Open Space Lands are located north of I 70 and stretch from Empire on the west to Fall River Road on the east. They are intermingled with private mining claims and abut the Arapahoe/Roosevelt National Forest to the north. Sheepkeep Open Space Lands to the south of I70 include the Lawson White Water Park, several other former BLM parcels in the Lawson-Fall River Road area, and several purchased parcels near Charlie's Place. The southern parcels include the Lawson Whitewater Park, and the Philadelphia Mill Site.

Management of the Sheepkeep Open Space Lands is focused on protecting the Big Horn Sheep habitat. Management of the Lands in this segment south of I70 is focused on providing recreational access to Clear Creek, , protecting the viewshed from I70 and the proposed path for the Clear Creek Trail (CCT) (aka Clear Creek Greenway).