Clear Creek County Open Space Annual Report 2015

Clear Creek Open Space Board

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Clear Creek County Open Space Commission 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 out-of-doors for residents and visitors.
INTRODUCTION

Annually, the Clear Creek County Open Space Commission (OSC) presents a report of its activities during the previous year. Having been in existence since 2000, the OSC has seen an increase in the amount of acreage under its management. It is now responsible for managing 4,892 acres.\(^1\) In recent years, the OSC has undertaken a number of large construction projects to enable the citizens of Clear Creek County and others to more easily access the Open Space lands. These projects include the Lawson White Water Park, the Philadelphia Mill Site Fishing Area, and a portion of the Clear Creek Greenway in Clear Creek Canyon.\(^2\)

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The Clear Creek County Open Space Program is funded by the Open Space Trust Fund. It was established in 2000 by a vote of the Clear Creek County voters; it authorizes one mil 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), Colorado History, and Gates Family Foundation.

MANAGEMENT

Since its inception, the OSC has bought or received by donation about 2,527 acres. In addition, the BOCC has given the OSC management authority for 3,269 acres of former Bureau of Land Management lands, often called “County Lands”. The OSC currently oversees 4,892 acres.

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\(^1\) The acreage managed by OSC is less than the two values combined because 904 acres of Beaver Brook Watershed were sold to the US Forest Service as that was the goal when the land was purchased in 2005.

\(^2\) The Clear Creek Greenway is the portion of the Peaks to Plains Trail that traverses Clear Creek County.
The properties vary in size, terrain, accessibility, and intensity of use. Management activities include developing plans, actual construction of trails and other facilities, and day-to-day maintenance (e.g., weeds, erosion control, trash collection, cleaning, and painting of fences, buildings, etc.). In addition, the OSC spends time on efforts that relate to the “workings” of open space which include submitting grant applications for funds, the management of grants and contracts received, and participation in County and state efforts that relate to open space.

Following is a summary of management activities undertaken in 2015.

➤ **Wildfire Risk Reduction in Beaver Brook Watershed: A Colorado Department of Natural Resources Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant (WWRG) and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Project** – OSC received two grants to address the wildfire risk in the Beaver Brook Watershed. The WWRG enabled the OSC to hire a contractor to thin 10.4 acres of Lodgepole pine. The Youth Corps Project which was funded by GOCO provided funds for the Youth Corps to bring two crews (for one week each) of 8 young adults to cut and clear 2.98 acres. The crews camped on the site. Both efforts were spearheaded by several OSC members with minimal guidance from the Open Space Coordinator. Their willingness to initiate and oversee the projects enabled Open Space to accomplish a significant management effort.

➤ **Volunteers for Outdoors Colorado (VOC)** Two VOC projects were completed in 2015. One was working on the final stage of the Saddleback Trail on Floyd Hill which has been part of the trail building program for several summers. This project included placement of erosion control structures, stone steps, and trail markers. 40 people worked for one day on this project. The other project occurred on the Rutherford Trail which starts in Georgetown and goes uphill to the Silver Dale area. This was the second year that VOC has worked on this trail. Efforts in 2015 were aimed at creating a boardwalk for the trail which would protect an environmentally sensitive wetland near the uphill end of the trail. Engineering and labor were provided by the VOC. Materials were provided by Open Space. 60 people participated in this 2 day effort. They camped near the Silver Dale parking lot on Guanella Road and enjoyed the opportunity to explore the Silver Dale area in addition to their efforts on the project.

➤ **OSC Logo and Web Page** Recognizing the increased importance of digital communication, a new logo was designed by an Open Space Commission member whose expertise is in the graphics and digital arena. It was approved in
Sign Work Day at the Philadelphia Millsite

Tree Removal at Lawson Whitewater Park
2015. The same member worked with the County’s Information Services staff to improve the Open Space website. As a starting point, it was decided to provide a map highlighting six Open Space properties on the OSC website. Links on the map would provide users with access to directions to the properties, trail maps, descriptions, historical background, and photographs. The new map was prepared by the County Mapping Department and posted. That map along with photographs and descriptions of each property will be used in the Tourism Board’s publication Spring 2016.

- **Revegetation Efforts** - Planting of trees and bushes was undertaken at several Open Space properties last Spring and Summer to help revegetate areas that had been disturbed either in construction or had been in that condition when Open Space received them. A variety of shrubs including cottonwood seedlings, currant bushes and other mountain hardy plants were planted at the Philadelphia Mill Site, the Lawson White Water Park, and the Bear Pen properties. Volunteers planted, watered and monitored these new trees and bushes through the Summer. Similar efforts had been undertaken at the Bear Pen property, located just east of the Hidden Valley Exit on I70, in 2014 when it was seeded with grasses in 2014 to recover the remnants of a driveway and trailer site. Successful revegetation was seen due to a wet Spring and Summer.

- **Cement House Mine Safety Project** – A mine safety project was completed at the Lone Star Radium Mine that is located inside the Cement House in Clear Creek Canyon. During an assessment of the property after completion of the purchase, the accessibility and potential liability from people accessing the mine was identified. OSC placed heavy wire mesh over all windows to prevent access to the building. However, concern about people entering the mine itself continued. The Colorado Department of Mining and Reclamation offered to place a gate across the mine opening to limit access to the tunnel. The work was completed in the Summer of 2015. The gate is designed to allow bats to use the cave but not people. This project was done at no cost to the OSC.

- **Property Identification and Signage** – Signage was posted at some key Open Space properties this year. The purpose was to inform the public of specific rules of use for that property. Properties included the Philadelphia Mill Site and Mill Creek Meadows. The specific rules are aimed at protecting historical artifacts and defining activities that were allowed.

- **Fishing is Fun Grant Creek Access Project** – Clear Creek Watershed Foundation built 3 sets of rock steps to the Creek on the Oxbow property and one set at the
Work Day At Alps Mountain Cabin
Philadelphia Mill Site. These were funded by a Fishing is Fun Grant from CPW and were completed on Open Space properties to improve access to the creek for visitors.

- **Acquisitions** – During 2015, Shadows Ranch and the Jackson properties were acquired by Open Space. Both of the properties improve creek access for residents and also include trails for the Clear Creek Greenway. The Jackson property included a demolition project on several buildings which will be completed in 2016. The Shadows Ranch property is being studied by the County and future use will be determined in discussion with the BOCC.

- **Clear Creek Greenway: Tunnel 5-6** – OSC staff was asked to manage the CDOT Transportation Alternatives Projects (TAP) grant for the design of the Greenway from the west end of Tunnel 5 to and past Tunnel 6. This project begins where the current canyon trail project ends. The first steps were to negotiate an IGA with CDOT, advertise the project, and select a firm to complete the design. Muller Engineering was awarded the contract and is working on the project. The results of their design will be used to pursue further additional funding for trail construction.

- **Clear Creek Greenway (a portion of Peaks to Plains Trail)** – Significant progress is being made on the Peaks to Plains Trail. The two miles of trail in Clear Creek County and four miles in Jefferson County are almost completed. Work on CCC2 is complete and the underpass under US 6 is done. The construction of a bench and retaining wall for the trail along the south side of the Creek is almost finished. This project started in 2012 as part of the Colorado River Corridor Initiative and will be completed in 2016. As a part of the Governor’s Colorado Beautiful Initiative, 16 trails were designated as priority trails. The Peaks to Plains Trail of which the Clear Creek Greenway is a segment was selected as one of the 16. That designation should help obtain funding for the completion of the Greenway through Clear Creek County and efforts are underway to secure such funding.

- **OSC Involvement in County Efforts** – Open Space Staff and members of the OSC were involved in a wide variety of open space and recreation related efforts throughout the County. Efforts included:
  - Shooting Range Working Group
  - OHV Task Force
  - County Master Plan Update
  - Recreation Working Group
Hikers on Clear Creek Greenway on the Oxbow

Biking, Rafting on trail in the Canyon
Climbers on Fiscal Cliff on trail

Parking Lot west of Tunnel 5
• Rutherford Trail Parking Area Purchase
• County Rafting Program—helping with Pat Access, coordination
• CCGA Greenway Design Project Steering Committee
• CCGA Greenway Board
• Fishing is Fun Grant—Game Check Station

ANTICIPATED ACTIVITIES IN 2016

Coming off of a busy 2015, the OSC looks ahead and sees the following:

- Continued work on the Clear Creek Greenway in the Canyon—both completion of the Tunnel 5 to the Jefferson County line and design/fundraising for the Tunnel 5 to Tunnel 6 segment.
- Hiring a consultant in cooperation with the Town of Georgetown, Historic Georgetown, and Historic District Public Lands Commission to develop a recreation management plan for the Upper Silver Dale area.
- Work in conjunction with the Clear Creek Greenway Authority on maintenance issues associated with the Clear Creek Greenway.
- Working with other County departments on trail signage and maintenance on other County trails.
- Continuing efforts on fire mitigation on Open Space properties.
- Development of components of a marketing strategy for Open Space lands and associated activities.
- Ongoing assessment of Open Space properties and undertaking tasks needed to address management issues.

During the year, we will continue to respond to Open Space opportunities as they arise.