LARIMER COUNTY | DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

1800 South County Road 31, Loveland, Colorado 80537, 970.619.4570, Larimer.org

LARIMER COUNTY OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD

The mission of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is to establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.

Date: May 23, 2019

Time: 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Location: Larimer County Loveland Campus Building, 200 Peridot Avenue, Loveland, CO 80537, Poudre River Room

Contact: Please contact Emmy at ellisoea@co.larimer.co.us or 970-619-4462 if you are unable to attend

AGENDA

Scheduled times are subject to change.

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS
2. PUBLIC COMMENT
3. AGENDA REVIEW
4. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES
5. INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS
    a. Natural Resource events for this month: See http://www.larimer.org/naturalresources.
    b. To sign up for Open Lands Advisory Board minutes, go to http://larimer.org/subscriptions.cfm, enter your email, click 'Subscribe,' and then check the 'Open Lands Advisory Board' box.
    c. Larimer County Comprehensive Master Plan draft is publicly available for review through 5/31 at: https://larimercompplan.com/comprehensive-plan-draft-review – Meegan
    d. Passage of House Bill 19-0871 with amendments – Justin
    e. Introduction of Sidney Michl as new Department Specialist – Meegan

f. River Bluffs restoration project was selected as 1 of 4 (out of 17!) state-funded projects for a site visit from DOLA – Meegan
g. Change to District/Area Reports – Daylan

6. REPORTS
    a. The 2018 Annual Report can be found here: https://www.larimer.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2019/natural_resources_annual_report_2018.pdf – Daylan

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS
    a. Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA) tool presentation – Jason Brothers/George Wallace

8. ACTION ITEMS
    a. Pittington Conservation Easement Final Review

9. OTHER BUSINESS

10. NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED: June 27, 2019 at the Larimer County Loveland Campus Building, 200 Peridot Avenue, Loveland, CO 80537, Poudre River Room

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Pursuant to C.R.S. (24-6-402(4)(a)) for discussion pertaining to the purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer or sale of any real, personal or other property interest.

12. ADJOURN

Included in PDF:	*Attached Separately:*
• Agenda • Larimer County LESA Revisions April 2019 • Pittington CE Final Review documents	• Minutes of last meeting

DRAFT Larimer County LESA Revisions, April, 2019

The following draft prepared by Charlie Gindler and Travis Rollins (Larimer County Natural Resources staff), Jason Brothers and George Wallace Agricultural Advisory Board (AAB) members. It is intended to update the Larimer County Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system used to evaluate agricultural and related lands for fee simple acquisition or conservation easements where County resources are utilized. It has been reviewed by the full Agricultural Advisory Board and former Cooperative Extension advisor Ernie Marx. Next it will be presented to the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board (OLAB) and Open Lands staff for review and recommendations regarding adoption. Our suggested changes are focus on the "Site Assessment" process as the "Land Evaluation" (LE) which rates soil productivity will remain the same except for the scores assigned. Scoring now fit the modifications to and increased emphasis given Site Assessment (SA) which acknowledge land use changes in Larimer County and the Northern Front Range. The LE and SA components are together worth a possible 1000 points with 300 assigned to LE and 700 to SA. *Once changes are reviewed by the Board of County Commissioners, the introductory sections, scoring sheet and appendix can be adjusted by Open Lands staff and put into final revised document.*

Land Evaluation (LE) Component

The Land Evaluation component rates soil productivity and still relies on NRC soils data and mapping. It follows the method used in the original Larimer County LESA system of multiplying the percentage of each soil classification found on the property by the LE score for that soil capability class. A total of 300 points are possible (should the parcel have all Class I soils for example).

The LE evaluation for ranchland differs from the evaluation of cropland in that it is conducted only on portion of the ranch that produces forage for harvest. Most often this will be the irrigated or sub-irrigated hay lands. Like the original Larimer County LESA system, an additional 30 possible points can be given for wet meadows which provide multiple types of productivity.

Capability Class	LE Value
I	300
II	250
III	200
IV	150
V	100
VI	50
VII	0

Example of the LE on a given cropland parcel:

Soil map unit	Capability Class	Percent of site	LE Value	LE Score
46	II	33.3	250	83.25
95	III	50	200	100
67	IV	16.7	150	25,05
			Total LE Value	208.3

Site Assessment (SA) Component

The revised site assessment component of LESA rates the non-soil factors affecting a site's relative importance for agricultural use. There are two categories of site assessment factors:

SA-1 factors: non-soil characteristics affecting agricultural productivity and farm sustainability;

SA-2 factors: other public values of a site supporting its retention in agriculture.

The Agricultural Advisory and Open Lands Advisory boards identified four SA-1 factors, and four SA-2 factors for use in the Larimer County system. These SA factors are:

SA-1:

- farm size
- production history
- water availability and reliability
- land condition
- contiguity with other agricultural parcels

SA-2:

- habitat value
- strategic value
- visual/scenic value
- cultural/historical value

Many other SA factors could be included in a LESA system. The factors listed above are those AAB members determined to be the most important with respect to Larimer County agriculture.

SA-1: Non-Soil Factors Affecting Agricultural Productivity

1) Farm Size and Productivity: cap is 100 pts.

For many farms and ranches, the efficiency associated with farming a large acreage often results in larger farms being more economically viable and able to resist pressures and reduce conflicts from adjacent land uses. This is particularly true with **dry-land farming and ranching** operations and with **irrigated farms that produce traditional commodities**, though land and water prices may limit ability to purchase larger irrigated parcels, **protecting portions** of an economically viable operation helps to keep that going.

That said, in recent years the County has seen an increase in **smaller high value crop farms and nurseries** that do **direct marketing** via farmers markets, farm stands, client harvesting, or sales to

local middlemen who distribute to stores and restaurants. Such farms have become part of the agricultural diversity of Larimer county. They are often located closer to developed areas and create little conflict. They are well received by the public as neighbors as important components in the "be local, buy local" and CSA movement and may be worthy of protection by open space and other programs even with their smaller size. A farm size scaling has been developed to accommodate each category of farm or ranch. If the parcel acquired adds to a viable size if we could consider the total size of the farm or ranch)

When determining farm size, an operation's **total acres suitable for agriculture are considered**. Acres of rock outcrops, home sites, or inaccessible areas are not included in farm size criteria. Land containing farm infrastructure that is an integral part of the agricultural operation is included in farm size (e.g., barns, silos). Farm and ranch size scaling differ as shown in the following tables, not all of which are utilized for a given property being evaluated.

TABLE 1. Acreage Scaling

Total Acres Suitable for Grazing	**Points**
>2500	100
>2000	80
>1500	60
>1000	40
Total Acres Suitable for Crops	**Points**
>640	100
>480	90
>320	80
>160	70
Acres suitable for direct market cultivated crops	**Points**
25+	100
10-24	75
6-10	50
0-5	25

2) Production History : cap is 100 pts.

For commodity crops, **yields for a 5 or 10 year period** can be averaged and classified as "above average, average and below average" for purposes of the evaluation. This data is readily available on a

county level https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Colorado/index.php . For smaller value added or direct marketing horticultural type operations**, "gross income per acre"** can be utilized and compared with similar operations in the region. This data is just becoming available as more parcels are evaluated. Current research for example (Appendix X) shows median gross income per acre to be around $33,000/acre. We will consider +or- 10% of this median to be considered within an "average yield" category for purposes of this evaluation

Table 2: Per Acre Production History

Row Crops	
Above Average Yields	100 Points
Within Range of Average Yields	50 Points
Below Average Yields	0 Points
Direct Market/Value Added Crops	
Above Median Gross Income Range	100 Points
Within Median Gross Income Range	50 Points
Below Median Gross Income Range	0 Points

3) Value of Water Rights for Irrigated Farms and Ranches

The value of water rights to agricultural operations is a function of both the **adequacy and reliability** of the water supply. The most desirable agricultural properties will feature water rights with a yield that is sufficient to support full crop development.

In Larimer County, with the exception of a few dry land farms like those comprising the Long View Open Space area, adequate and reliable irrigation water is critical for farms and ranches. Adjudicated well rights are desirable because they are not dependent on a ditch system for delivery, can be turned on earlier and run later in the season, and cannot be separated from the land. Non-tributary well rights are most desirable because they do not require stream augmentation. Owned water is more desirable than leased water because of its long-term reliability. Farms with long-term water sharing agreements are also desirable because they have alternate sources of income in a dry year and provide community benefits. In assigning points for cropland irrigation, some consideration should be given for the viability of the ditch company and laterals serving the farm. For protection schemes that includes water sharing, the ability to exchange and store water are important.

Water Adequacy for Irrigated Crops and Forage: cap is 100 points

Table 3: Average Annual Water Yield

Inches water per acre	Points
Sprinkler- Average Water Yield > 24 inches	100

Sprinkler- Average Water Yield 12 - 24 inches	75
Sprinkler- Average Water Yield < 12 inches	50
Flood- Average Water Yield > 36 inches	100
Flood- Average Water Yield 18 - 36 inches	75
Flood- Average Water Yield < 18 inches	50
Irrigation entity has average early on dates (< May 10th) dates*	10 for commodity farm 15 for horticultural farm
Irrigation entity has average late off (> September 1st) date*	10 for commodity farm 15 for horticultural farm

*For maximum value, an irrigation source must be available early in the season for early crops or those with a long growing season. Similarly, irrigation water that is available through the end of the crop growing season is of greater value. This is especially true for horticultural operations that use things like hoop houses and frost cloth to extend production.

Water Reliability: cap is 60 points

1. Dry year yield of water rights.

   2002 Yield ÷ 1990-2010 Average Yield x 30

2. Add 10 points for augmented wells
3. Add 10 points for decreed non-tributary wells.
4. Add 10 points if the water rights include reservoir storage rights. Add 10 points if the water supply is 100% owned, or Add 5 points if the water supply is more than 50% but less than 100% owned.
5. Add 10 points if livestock water is available in multiple pastures on a ranch
6. Add 10 points if the farm or ranch has a water sharing agreement

Recognizing that ranches have different water requirements than crop farms, an additional water availability scaling was designed for rangeland that focuses on availability of stock water in pastures in a way that enables rotational grazing. Calculate the Reliability Factor by adding components 1-6.

3) Current Land Condition: cap is 80 pts.

As land condition declines, agricultural productivity declines and production expenses can increase. The LESA steering committee identified weeds and erosion as measurable indicators of land condition.

Erosion

Erosion is one of the most serious negative characteristics of any parcel since it is an almost permanent impact. Therefore, erosion control **is awarded 50 points**. The points are earned if there is no evidence of active gullying, wind erosion, eroded soil deposits or deflations. If there is some erosion but evidence of erosion control, **25 points are awarded**

Weeds

Weed control is **awarded 30 points**. These points are earned if less than 5% of the land has a problem infestation of Colorado state-listed noxious weeds. A problem infestation is defined as a patch with greater than 70% density (ground cover). The most current list of Colorado noxious weeds is available from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industry (http://www.ag.state.co.us/DPI/home.html), found in Appendix D of this handbook. The Larimer County Weed Control District can provide weed mapping services on a fee basis (see Contacts for More Information, page 20).

5) Contiguity: cap is 60 pts.

Farms or ranches that are contiguous with other commercial farms and ranches – especially those that have conservation status, are more sustainable. Given the accelerated growth along the Front Range in Larimer County, contiguity is a better indicator of suitability than distance from an annexation boundary – especially given the inflated annexations witnessed in recent years. Contiguous farms and ranches are likely to share needed infrastructure like ditches, stock driveways, fences that contain livestock etc. They may be providing needed community separation even if they are close to annexation boundaries. Contiguity reduces potential conflicts with non –agricultural land uses, may allow for easier movement of animals and equipment and can strengthen the culture of agriculture and collaboration between neighbors involved in the same endeavors. Scaling for contiguity allows points for parcels having contiguity with conserved farms or ranches and for contiguity with other agricultural operations.

(That said, some successful **smaller direct market farms** in strategic locations within urban and ex-urban areas that are not contiguous with other agricultural operations, but which score well on other SA-2 factors could be awarded points under the Strategic Value criteria at the discretion of the evaluating team.)

TABLE 4. Contiguity with other agricultural operations

Proximity to Nearby Agricultural Operations	**Adjacent to others**	**1/2 mile or less**	**1 mile or less**
Score	90	75	50
if Proximal to Conserved Agricultural Operations			

Score	20	15	10

SA-2: Other public values of a site supporting its retention in agriculture:

While not a measure of a site's agricultural productivity, SA-2 factors reflect a broader view of the values and benefits provided by farm and ranch land which have become increasingly important in Larimer County. Agricultural lands serve as community separators and can add to and buffer open space for example with few public management costs. They provide wildlife habitat and can enhance biodiversity. They can be strategic in how they affect economic activity or support other agricultural activities as is the case with dairies and animal feeding facilities. They may contain cultural and historic value or represent a multi-generational knowledge base as Centennial Farms and Ranches do.

1) Habitat Value: cap is 50 points

Agricultural lands often provide habitat for animal and plant species not related to agricultural production. Plant/vegetative communities and wildlife diversity are indicators of a parcel's habitat value. The presence of **habitat for specific threatened or endangered species** is also recognized as having a high public value.

The Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) has identified many species as rare or imperiled and has mapped locations where these species occur. CNHP information on habitat locations can be obtained directly from the CNHP office (see page 20, Contacts for More Information).

Many conservation biologists now combine an emphasis on habitat for particular species with a landscape approach. The concept of habitat also includes areas of **naturally occurring habitat** that is allowed to persist as well as **man-made or restored habitat that** compensates for the loss of biodiversity or species and habitat elsewhere**.** Such habitat would include wind breaks, perennial grass and shrub plantings on pivot irrigation corners, restored wetlands, food plots left for wildlife, exclusion of grazing from pollinator habitat and other related practices. Such habitat loss mitigation may include plantings of non-native species that nonetheless support biodiversity - both natives (migratory song birds) and non-natives valued by the public (ring-neck pheasants etc.).

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TABLE 5. Habitat Value Scaling. (Select all that apply, but points not to exceed 50)

Criteria	Score
Site known to support a federal or state endangered or threatened plant or animal species; site known to support a plant or animal species or plant community classified by the CNHP as rare or imperiled (G1-G3 ranking)	50

Site known to support a high diversity of native plant or native animal species as noted by CNHP	25
Substantial natural habitat excluded from agricultural use	25
Added or enhanced landscape features that provide habitat or promote biodiversity such as shelter belts, wetlands, buffer strips, habitat patches	25
Land does not support meaningful habitat for numbers of plants or animals.	0

2) Strategic Value: cap of 50 points

Some sites have strategic value as components of a community separator, greenbelt or open space plan. Preserving land in agriculture can be an economical means of providing the public with open land. Preserving land adjacent to existing protected open space effectively enlarges the open space and is considered a public benefit. Likewise, farming/ranching adjacent to protected open space can be beneficial to the agricultural producer because it provides additional grazing, or minimizes conflict potential neighboring land use conflicts may be avoided.
Confined animal feeding operations like dairies or feedlots (CAFOs) are important to our local food system and the viability and production of other ag lands and businesses in that they require forage from many more acres, provide much needed manure to organic and other crop producers and reuse by-products like distillers grains from local breweries etc. Conflicts with CAFOs are common and minimizing such conflicts by buffering them prevents problems and protecting the farmland they may have in conjunction or adjacent farms and ranches is strategic. The same principle might be applied to sugar beet dumps or other processing facilities. Finally, these characteristics provide value even if agriculture is reduced.

TABLE 6 Strategic Value Scaling

Criteria	Score
Portion of property exists within public agency plan for open space (e.g., open space, separator, regional trail).	50

Property is adjacent to and buffers existing permanently protected open space or ecologically sensitive area (e.g., public park, forestland, natural area, easement flood plain).	50
Property includes or is next to and buffers a dairy, concentrated animal feeding operation or processing facility	50
Direct market urban or exurban farm that is strategically located and scores well on other SA-1 and SA-2 factors (fertility size, water etc.)	50

3) Visual/Scenic Value: cap of 50 pts

Many farms and ranches contain landscapes with scenic value for the public. Farms and ranches also provide unobstructed views of mountains and other backdrops. Accessibility to viewing points is considered in determining the public value offered by the site. A scenic feature that is easily viewed by the public receives more points than a feature that is inaccessible and therefore offers less public value.

Visual/scenic scaling factors are shown in Table 9. Add the scores from each subcategory to determine the overall score for this factor.

TABLE 7. Visual/Scenic Value Scaling

Criteria	Level of quality or importance of feature		
	Low Score	**Med. Score**	**High Score**
Scenic feature(s) **on the property**, including geologic formations, vegetation, water or a representative rural landscape. (Points relative to the outstanding, unique, rare or prominent quality of the feature(s))	0	25	50
Property provides an unobstructed foreground or background to scenic feature(s) **off the property**. (Points relative to quality of scenic feature(s) off the property)	0	15	30
Level of public **accessibility to view points** to see scenic feature(s) on the property, or to view points where the property provides an unobstructed foreground or background to scenic feature(s) off the property. (Points relative to the importance of the view to the community as a whole)	0	10	20

Source: Larimer County LESA committee, July 2001.

4) Cultural/Historical Value: cap of 50 points

Farms and ranches can have cultural or historical value due to their role in our history or by being the location where events occurred before the farm or ranch was established. Features can be classified as either anthropological/archaeological or geologic/natural history.

Anthropological/archaeological features can include, but are not limited to:

- Native American sites
- burial grounds/family burial plots
- major historical trail (e.g. Overland Trail)
- centennial farms or ranches
- sites listed on Historic Register
- other local sites of cultural or historical interest

Geologic/natural history features can include, but are not limited to:

- dinosaur tracks or fossil beds
- unique outcroppings or landscape features
- state record trees

Documentation of cultural/historical features requires verification by an appropriate organization. A list of organizations on page 20 may be used to verify the importance of a feature.

TABLE 7. Cultural/Historical Value Scaling

Criteria	Points
Property contains significant features or history of interest to many	50
Property contains some features or history of local interest	25
Property does not contain significant features	0

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LARIMER COUNTY | NATURAL RESOURCES

1800 S. County Road 31, Loveland, CO 80537 | (970) 619-4570 | larimer.org/naturalresources

FINAL REVIEW: Pittington CE

Date: May 23, 2019
Staff Assigned: Charlie Johnson

Property Description:

The 162-acre Pittington Ranch is located in the Blue Mountain Conservation Priority area and adjacent to existing conserved lands including Flatiron Reservoir, Chimney Hollow and a RLUC conservation easement held by Colorado Open Lands. The broader conserved landscape includes the Blue Mountain Bison CE, Pinewood Reservoir, Ramsay-Shockey Open Space and beyond into USFS lands. The Pittington Ranch provides a buffer to these over 8,000 acres of privately conserved lands (not counting USFS acres) in the Blue Mountain Conservation Area. The Pittington Ranch is comprised of native foothills grasslands and shrublands as well as the riparian area of Cottonwood Creek and another unnamed tributary. The area supports native foothills wildlife including deer, elk, bear, mountain lion, birds, amphibians, fish and insects.

The landowner is willing to donate the value of a conservation easement to Larimer County and pursue State of Colorado tax credits. There is one existing homesite and associated outbuildings, and the property is currently used for cattle grazing. The owner has designated a building area of 4.019 acres encompassing the existing improvements and will retain the right to replace or enlarge those improvements.

Larimer County is responsible for paying all transaction costs ($50,000) associated with the donation.

Priority Area:	Blue Mountain Area
Short Legal:	Section 21, T 05 N, R 70 W Section 28, T 05 N, R 70 W
Acreage:	162 acres
Current Zoning:	O Open
Adjacent Zoning:	O Open
Water Rights:	None
Mineral Rights:	Intact.
Liens:	No

Evaluation Criteria:	***Staff Assessment***
Scenic Values	H
Buffer Values	H

Wetlands Values	M
Significant Plants/Natural Communities Values	M
Outdoor Recreation Values	N/A
Historical/Archaeological Values	L
Agricultural Values	M
Geological/Paleontological Values	L
Education Values	N/A
Context	H
Community Benefit	M
Partnerships/Cost-Value	H

Partnerships:

Jarene Pittington

Description:

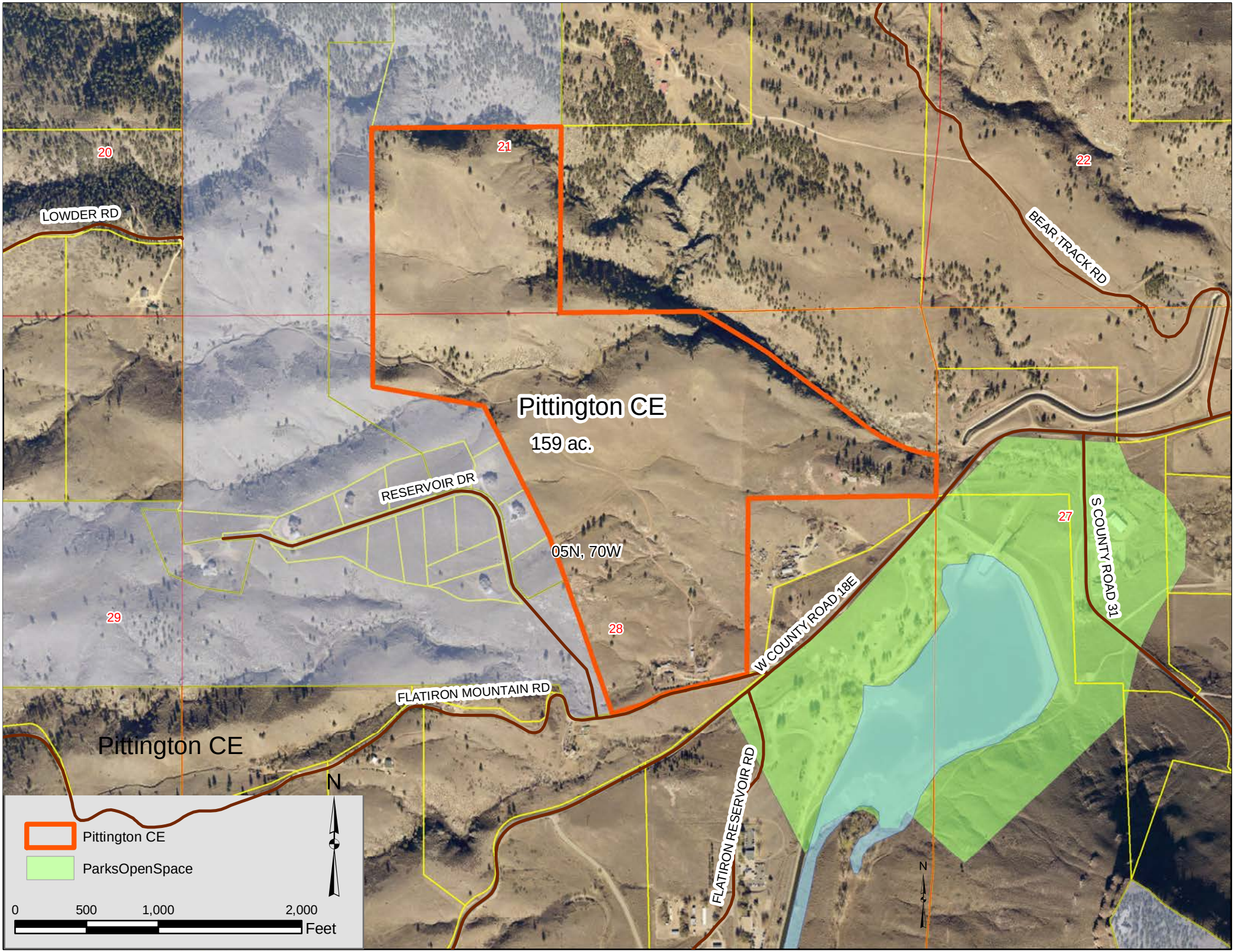
Donated CE value, as determined by appraisal.

Property Interest for Larimer County:
Conservation Easement

Purchase Price: $0.00
Financial Terms: None

Funding Sources:	***Amount:***
Pittington CE Value Donation	$300,000.00
Total:	$300,000.00

Closing Date: Tentative, pending OLAB / BOCC final approval
Open Lands Advisory Board Final Review Date: May 23, 2019
Board of County Commissioners Final Review Date:


20
21
22
LOWDER RD
BEAR TRACK RD
Pittington CE
159 ac.
RESERVOIR DR
05N, 70W
27
S COUNTY ROAD 31
29
28
W COUNTY ROAD 18E
FLATIRON MOUNTAIN RD
Pittington CE
N
Pittington CE
ParksOpenSpace
0
500
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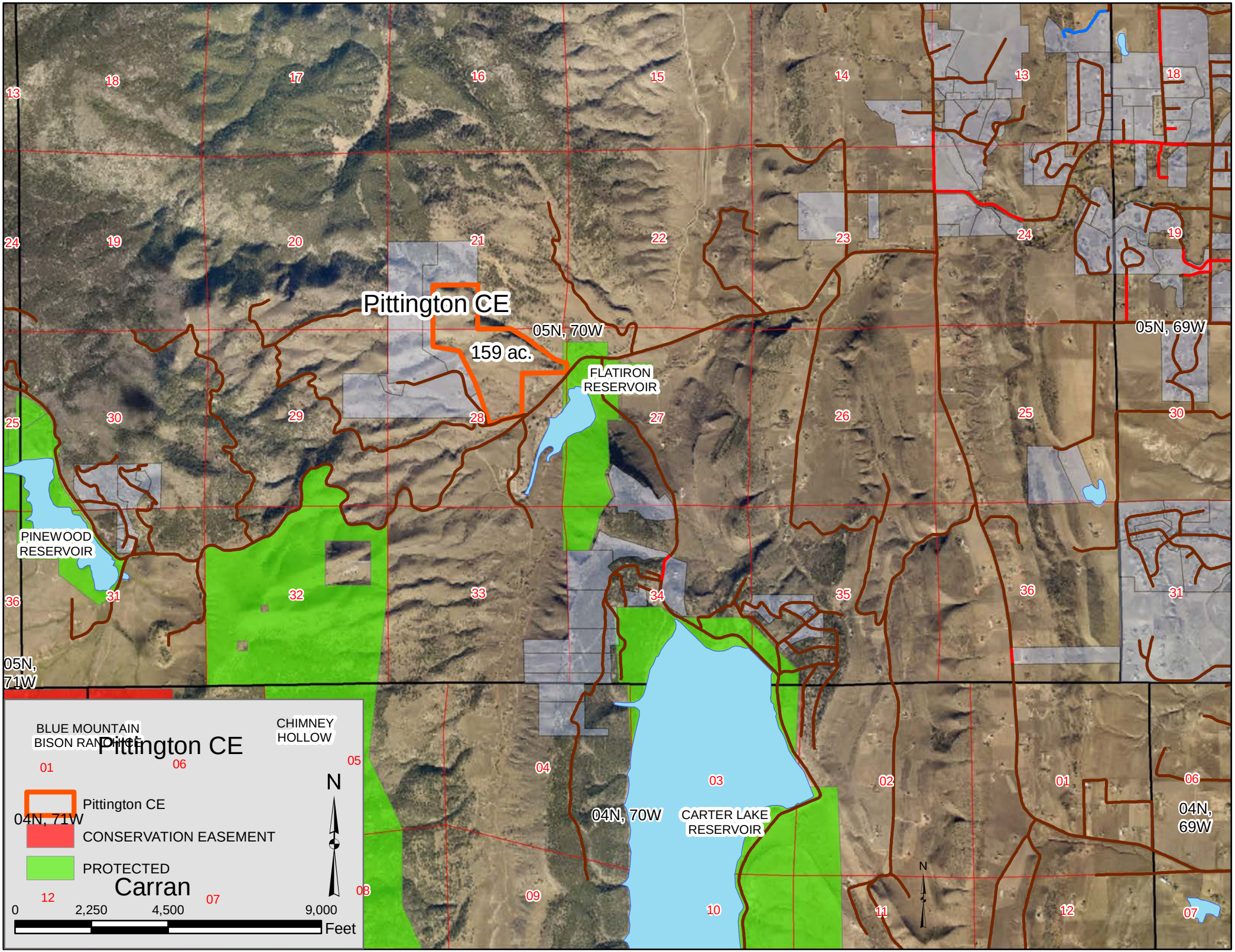
Pittington CE
159 ac.
05N, 70W
05N, 69W
FLATIRON RESERVOIR
PINEWOOD RESERVOIR
CARTER LAKE RESERVOIR
05N, 71W
04N, 70W
04N, 71W
04N, 69W
BLUE MOUNTAIN BISON RANCH
CHIMNEY HOLLOW
Pittington CE
Pittington CE
CONSERVATION EASEMENT
PROTECTED
Carran
N
0
2,250
4,500
9,000
Feet