

# OPEN LANDS PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT 1997

LARIMER COUNTY PARKS & OPEN LANDS





*A message from the chairman*

## Developing a strategic plan for the Open Lands Program

When the Larimer County Open Lands Program started in 1996 we were able to take aim at some big targets. Recognizing the strong support and urgent need for purchasing land in the Fort Collins/Loveland corridor, we acted quickly to acquire about 1,000 acres in that area. And thanks to purchases by the city of Fort Collins and cooperative efforts with Loveland, it's likely that more than 2,000 acres will be protected in the corridor by the end of 1998.

In 1997, with much of the urgent work in the corridor complete, the board prepared a long-range strategic plan to guide future acquisitions. Among the priorities identified are establishment of a regional park in the

southern foothills of the county and protection of lands near Fossil Creek Reservoir, where emphasis will be placed on protection of the ecology as well as appropriate public enjoyment of these unique areas. Further development of the regional trail system is also identified as a priority. After establishing these priorities, the county initiated negotiations on several new projects, including two that resulted in significant expansions to Horsetooth Mountain and Pinewood Reservoir regional parks. Park visitors will be welcomed to these expansions as soon as management plans and trail construction is completed.

*"Urban growth is a fact of life in Larimer County. We'll grow, but we can also make sure that important pieces of our western landscape are preserved—that's good planning. The Open Lands Program is an essential and effective component of our overall effort to make sure our quality of life is maintained."*

*Jim Disney,  
County Commissioner District 3*

Establishing cooperative partnerships for the purpose of leveraging resources continues to be a major emphasis. Our relationships with Loveland, Fort Collins and Estes Park continue to flourish, and we're also developing partnerships with Berthoud, Colorado State University, the State Land Board, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. These cooperative efforts encourage more regional planning efforts and grant writing. These are truly synergistic relationships, allowing us to accomplish far more together than any entity could alone.

The Open Lands Program also sponsored a variety of programs aimed at fostering sound land protection and stewardship throughout the county. These included the Small Grants Program, workshops for property owners to discuss land preservation techniques and encourage donation of conservation easements, a road-scar reclamation project, an agricultural land preservation forum, and more.

In all, 1997 was very productive, and already we are involved in numerous projects for 1998.

When the citizens of Larimer County voted overwhelmingly for the open space tax, their actions sent a clear message: Preserving portions of our Western landscape for the public as well as for wildlife is a core value of local residents. All of us involved in the Open Lands Program share that sentiment, and we want you to know that we take that message very seriously.



Tom Keith,  
Chairman, Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board

*A message from the director*

## Community Values Set A Clear Vision

In November 1997, I accepted the opportunity to join the Larimer County Parks and Open Lands Department as director. Serving the citizens of Larimer County is a great honor and a dream come true for me!

Department employees are dedicated to their work and enthusiastic about providing services to the public. Citizens of the county, no matter their backgrounds, seem to be united in how they value our western landscape. They are clear in their determination to maintain, protect and expand our incredible parks and natural areas. That community vision gives us clear direction, and frankly, makes our jobs a lot easier.

During 1997, we made significant improvements to our regional parks. To provide safe and enjoyable experiences for all visitors, we renovated boat ramps, picnic areas and campgrounds and added new trails and sanitary facilities at Carter Lake, Horsetooth Mountain Park and Reservoir, and Pinewood and Flatiron reservoirs. Thanks to a new user-fee system, we also have the money available to make sure these new facilities are maintained properly.

Another major effort this year will be the continued planning for a new Larimer County Fair and Events Center. The existing site in Loveland is no longer adequate. A special citizens' task force has identified a site in Loveland east of I-25 for establishing a permanent venue. Look for a citizen's initiative on the ballot in November, 1998.

Our goals are to continue providing residents with quality outdoor recreational facilities and to preserve significant parcels of our western landscape. Thanks to your support, we plan to be busy!



Greg Pickett,  
Director, Parks and Open Lands Department



# Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

of the Larimer County Open Lands Program

The Mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program is to preserve and provide significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural diversity. Efforts to fulfill this mission will be guided by the following principles:

- Important open lands, natural areas, parks and trails are defined in the Help Preserve Open Spaces Initiative, the Larimer County Parks Master Plan, the Plan for the Region Between Loveland and Fort Collins and other adopted plans.
- Acquisition is fair to property owners, taxpayers and Larimer County citizens, and is from willing sellers only.
- An emphasis is focused on working with willing landowners to develop land-use alternatives and protection strategies that meet the landowner's financial needs and the County's goal to preserve significant open lands.
- Available resources are invested in a manner to achieve a balance between urgent, immediate demands and farsighted, long-range goals.
- Stewardship of our land acquisitions is very important. Larimer County develops wise management policies that fit within our fiscal resources. When development of trails and outdoor recreation facilities is determined appropriate, then development and management of these facilities minimizes conflicts with wildlife needs and is sensitive to the natural environment.
- Distribution of funds over time for open lands, parks and trails is balanced and fairly distributed throughout the county.
- Cooperation with partners is important to leverage available resources. Partners include municipalities, government agencies and programs, land trusts and private individuals.

## Open Lands Board Provides Representation, Expertise

The Open Lands Advisory Board gives recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners regarding land purchases.

Board members include one elected official or an appointee from Berthoud, Estes Park, Fort Collins and Loveland; one member from the Larimer County Planning Commission; seven citizens appointed at large, and one appointed alternate. The membership of the advisory board represents a balance in geography, population and interest.

The board members are:

- Tom Keith, chairman of the board, is an environmental planner who lives in Fort Collins.
- John Heaton, retired from the U.S. Forest Service, lives in the corridor area between Fort Collins and Loveland.
- Larry Kendall is chairman of The Group, a Fort Collins real estate company. He also lives in Fort Collins.
- Linda Stanley is a professor at Colorado State University and lives in Fort Collins.
- Nancy Wallace, an attorney, farms with her husband in northern Larimer County.
- Wendell Amos is a member of the Rural Land Use Board, serves on the Larimer County Planning Commission, and lives in Estes Park.
- Pete Salg, owner of area Wendy's Restaurants Inc., is on the Rural Land Use Board and also serves on the Larimer County Planning Commission. He lives in Loveland.

- Milan Karspeck is an appointed member from the Berthoud Town Board.
- George Hix, an Estes Park native, is an appointed member from the Estes Park Town Board.
- Tom Shoemaker is an appointed member and Director of Natural Resources for the city of Fort Collins.
- Kathy Gilliland, Mayor of Loveland, is an appointed member from the City of Loveland.
- Kathay Rennels, a rancher and Realtor, is an appointed member from the Larimer County Planning Commission. She lives in the Livermore area.
- Merrill Kaufman, an alternate, is an ecologist for the U.S. Forest Service and lives in Fort Collins.

The board meets the fourth Thursday of every month, 5-8 p.m. The meetings are open to the public. For meeting location or more information, call 679-4570.



Open Lands Board and Staff — Front row l. to r.: Nancy Wallace, Greg Pickett, Linda Stanley, Tom Keith, George Hix. Back row l. to r.: Larry Kendall, Pete Salg, K-Lynn Cameron, Merrill Kaufman, Eve Yanda, John Heaton, Wendell Amos, Milan Karspeck, Daryl Burkhard, Tom Shoemaker. Not pictured: Kathy Gilliland, Kathay Rennels, and Jerry White.



# 1997

## Acquisition Highlights

Open Lands preservation goes far beyond the purchase of property. It's our job to foster environmentally-sound public use and land stewardship, look ahead to plan for future needs, and form strategic partnerships to help us accomplish open lands goals for the entire county. Sometimes our efforts result in multi-million dollar expenditures, other times they result in a meeting where only information is exchanged.

During 1997, the majority of our work took the form of strategic planning, land negotiations and initiation of low-cost programs. These efforts set in place important guides for the future. Following are brief descriptions of some of our most important highlights.



*Bald eagles hunt in the waters of Fossil Creek Reservoir.*

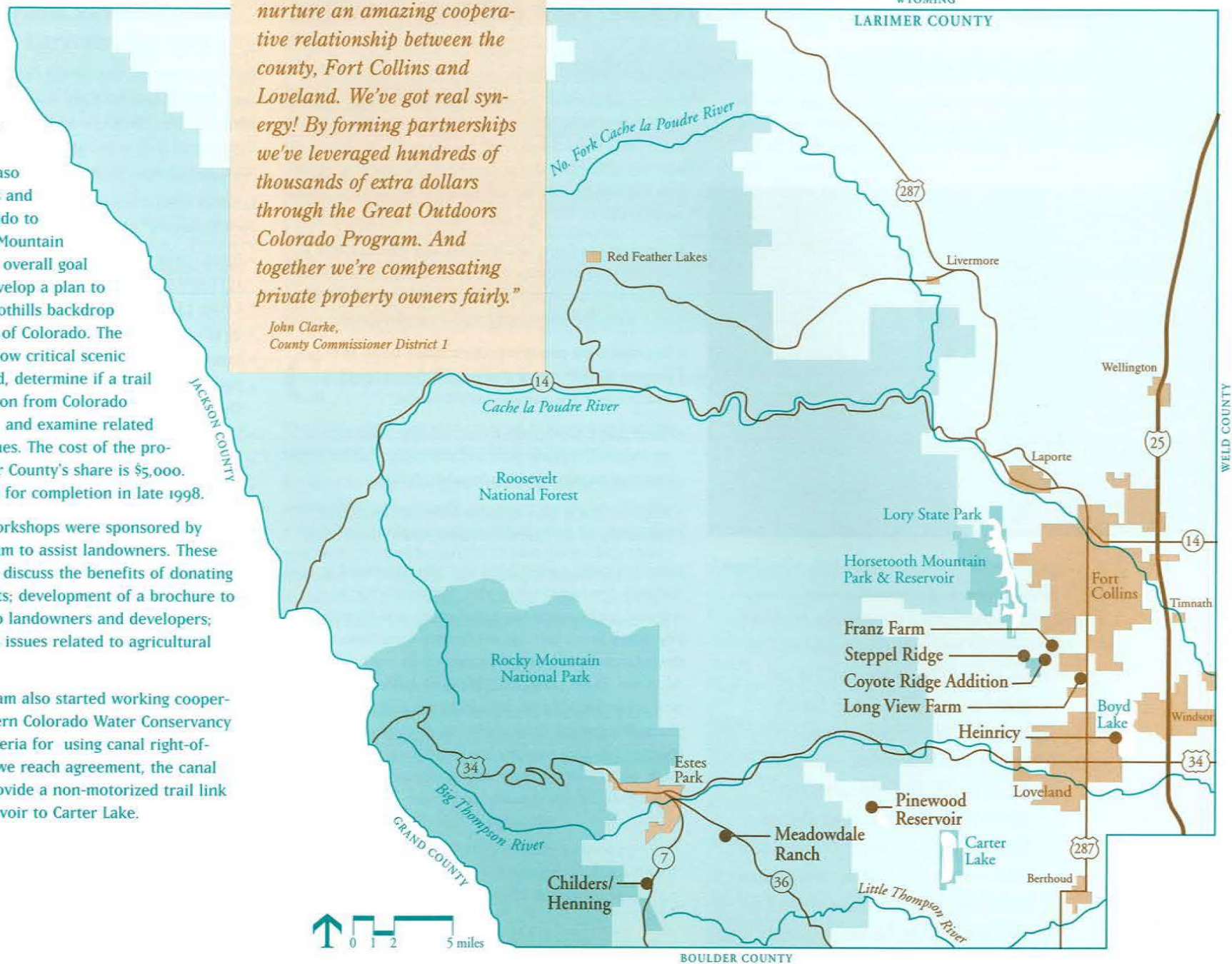
- To assist with the purchase of Long View Farm, initiated in 1996, Great Outdoors Colorado awarded the county and partners a \$400,000 grant.
- The county purchased 177 acres adjacent to Pinewood Reservoir to help preserve important wildlife habitat and a scenic ridgeline. The purchase also provides land for an appropriate and needed hiking trail, and adds to the existing 250 acres of Pinewood Reservoir. Cost: \$325,000.
- Great Outdoors Colorado granted the county \$50,000 to fund enhancements to provide handicap accessibility and to improve boat access in Satanka Cove at Horsetooth Reservoir.
- The Open Lands Program granted \$10,000 to the town of Berthoud to help fund a cooperative project working with interested landowners to preserve nearby agricultural lands.
- The Open Lands Program received a donation valued at \$250,000 to assist in the construction of a visitors' center in the Carter Lake area.
- Two major projects to inventory resources and open space acquisition potential were completed for the Big Thompson and Little Thompson River corridors. These inventories will be used for long-term land preservation and public use planning.
- Work started in mid-year to develop a new management plan for Horsetooth Mountain Park. The management plan for this popular park had not been updated since 1983.
- In cooperation with the Nature Conservancy, we obtained a \$300,000 grant from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs to help fund the removal and clean-up of more than 300,000 tires from the Roberts Ranch near Livermore. The clean-up effort, which includes recycling the tires, will take about two years to complete. The Nature Conservancy and Larimer County are working together to preserve the 16,000-acre Roberts Ranch.
- Adjoining landowner Steve Hird provided up to \$15,000 to the Open Lands Program to fund reclamation of road cuts on the highly visible hogback between Fort Collins and Loveland.
- The Small Grants Program was established to assist individuals, homeowners' associations, school groups and others with preservation and public access efforts. We have allocated \$10,000 annually to be used to award grants up to \$2,000 each. Grant money will be used for improving wildlife habitat, enhancing riparian and wetland areas, improving natural areas, providing trail linkages to existing open lands, aiding environmental education efforts, etc. In the initial pilot project, a neighborhood group in Loveland used a grant to reclaim a drainage ditch into a productive wetland.



- In a cooperative effort, Larimer County has teamed up with Boulder, Douglas, El Paso and Jefferson counties and Great Outdoors Colorado to fund the Front Range Mountain Backdrop Project. The overall goal of the project is to develop a plan to preserve the scenic foothills backdrop along the Front Range of Colorado. The study will determine how critical scenic areas can be preserved, determine if a trail could connect the region from Colorado Springs to Fort Collins, and examine related resource and legal issues. The cost of the project is \$75,000. Larimer County's share is \$5,000. The study is scheduled for completion in late 1998.
- Several educational workshops were sponsored by the Open Lands Program to assist landowners. These included: a seminar to discuss the benefits of donating conservation easements; development of a brochure to explain trail liability to landowners and developers; and a forum to discuss issues related to agricultural land preservation.
- The Open Lands Program also started working cooperatively with the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District to develop criteria for using canal right-of-ways for trails. When we reach agreement, the canal right-of-ways could provide a non-motorized trail link from Horsetooth Reservoir to Carter Lake.

*"One of the most wonderful aspects of the Open Lands Program is that it has helped nurture an amazing cooperative relationship between the county, Fort Collins and Loveland. We've got real synergy! By forming partnerships we've leveraged hundreds of thousands of extra dollars through the Great Outdoors Colorado Program. And together we're compensating private property owners fairly."*

*John Clarke,  
County Commissioner District 1*





## Setting Priorities: Focusing Preservation, Park and Trail Strategies

In 1996, the first full year of the Open Lands Program, we identified a few key parcels of land that were essential to include in our preservation program. Efforts to purchase those properties were successful and the early goals of the program have been met.



Open space for people as well as wildlife.

*"Everywhere I go, county residents remind me that they want me to make sure their tax dollars are spent wisely. The Open Lands Program is a great example of how government can work efficiently and fairly to serve the public. The Open Lands Board has developed specific priorities that will assure our money is used in the best possible manner to benefit everyone in Larimer County."*

Cheryl Olson,  
County Commissioner District 2

However, after key purchases were negotiated, we realized we needed to put in place a better system for future evaluations. Since the Open Lands Program started, we have been approached by owners who want their lands to be considered for preservation. While the interest of landowners is greatly appreciated, we have also learned that we do not have the resources to preserve it all.

So, in 1997 the Open Lands Board and staff decided to take a strategic approach for prioritizing preservation decisions. The board directed staff to develop recommendations that identified priorities in three areas:

- Regional park preserves: Open space lands with scenic, wildlife, natural area and recreational values that include appropriate public access.
- Open Space: Lands with scenic, wildlife, natural area, agricultural, regional park and community buffer values that may or may not include public access.
- Regional trails: Non-motorized recreational trails identified in the Larimer County Parks Master Plan.

Using the parks master plan that was developed in 1993, the staff developed a map that displayed existing regional parks, open space and trails, and identified key future areas. In July, the County Commissioners, the Open Lands Board, and the Open Lands staff participated in the "Open Lands Prioritization Exercise." The process included financial limitations and in depth group discussions. Priorities were then identified on a county map. This exercise has given clear priorities to guide efforts for purchase and preservation efforts for open space, regional parks, and trails.

The priority areas and projects are spread throughout the county – from the Laramie Foothills in the north to the hogbacks and foothills west of Loveland to the Berthoud area. With the top priorities identified, the Open Lands staff now has a clear focus for directing its time, energy and resources.

Areas of special interest for Open Space and Regional Park Preserves\* include:

- Fossil Creek Reservoir and the Fort Collins/Loveland Corridor
- Carter Lake/Pinewood Reservoir
- Devil's Backbone to Horsetooth Reservoir
- Laramie Foothills
- Poudre River west of LaPorte, and the Rist Canyon/Bellvue area
- Horsetooth Mountain Park Buffer
- Big Thompson Canyon entrance
- Estes Valley
- Loveland/Berthoud Corridor

Areas of special interest for Regional Trails\* include:

- Lake Estes Trail, Estes Park
- Fort Collins to Loveland trail links: east & west of 287
- Homer Rouse Memorial Trail, Estes Park
- Poudre River Trail: Fort Collins to Timnath
- Foothills: Devil's Backbone to Horsetooth Reservoir
- Berthoud to Lonetree Reservoir
- Hansen Canal: Horsetooth Reservoir to Poudre River
- Poudre River Trail: Timnath to Windsor
- Poudre River Trail: Laporte to Gateway Park
- Hansen Canal: Horsetooth Reservoir to Carter Lake
- Wellington to Wildlife Areas and Reservoir #4

\*from willing sellers only



## A Regional Park Preserve for Southern Larimer County

Horsetooth Mountain Park, Horsetooth Reservoir and Lory State Park provide a beautiful backdrop and great outdoor recreational opportunities for the Fort Collins area.

A top priority of the Open Lands Program is to secure land in the foothills west of Loveland and Berthoud to provide the same recreational and open space opportunities for the southern end of the county. The county manages regional park facilities at Carter Lake, Pinewood and Flatiron Reservoirs. Expanding these parklands will add significant benefits to all county residents and preserve a unique area in the county. Currently we are engaged in discussions with the landowners. This is a long-term project and many details must be negotiated. And, it is important for county residents to know that preservation and public access in this area is important, and we are working diligently toward this goal.

## Planning for Fossil Creek Reservoir Conservation Park

Wetlands provide rich habitat for wildlife. A major area that we believe needs protection is Fossil Creek Reservoir, which is home for Great Blue Herons, Bald Eagles, and many other bird species.

Parks and Open Lands is working with other entities to establish this area as a regional conservation park. We've entered into an agreement with the North Poudre Irrigation Company, owner of the reservoir, to allow planning efforts to proceed. Other partners involved include the State Land Board, Poudre School District, City of Fort Collins, and the Division of Wildlife.

When the conservation park is established, it will preserve one of the region's most important wetland/wildlife areas. The public will be invited to use the area for wildlife viewing, fishing, hiking and picnicking. In addition, the Fossil Creek Trail will offer more opportunities for recreation trail activities, and will provide a major connection between Fort Collins and Loveland.

## Help Preserve Open Spaces Tax Revenues Benefit the Entire County

Money to fund Open Lands Programs comes from a 1/4 cent sales and use tax. The tax is not imposed on food purchased in grocery stores.

The tax continues through 2003, and it is estimated collections will total more than \$59 million. Projections are based on an 8% annual growth rate in revenues. Distribution to incorporated areas is based on the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation.

Annual Revenue Projections and Distribution of Open Space Tax (in millions \$)\* 1997

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Larimer County	2.260	2.485	2.684	2.899	3.131	3.381	3.652	3.944	24.437	41.197
Berthoud	.071	.081	.087	.094	.102	.110	.119	.128	.794	1.338
Estes Park	.162	.178	.192	.208	.224	.242	.262	.283	1.752	2.953
Fort Collins	2.107	2.320	2.505	2.706	2.922	3.156	3.408	3.681	22.804	38.445
Loveland	.847	.932	1.007	1.087	1.174	1.268	1.370	1.479	9.165	15.450
Timnath	.004	.005	.005	.005	.006	.006	.007	.007	.046	.077
Wellington	.030	.033	.035	.038	.041	.044	.048	.052	.320	.540
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5.482</b>	<b>6.033</b>	<b>6.516</b>	<b>7.037</b>	<b>7.600</b>	<b>8.208</b>	<b>8.865</b>	<b>9.574</b>	<b>59.317</b>	<b>100</b>

\* These figures are unaudited. Audit to be completed in mid 1998. Figures in this chart have been rounded up when appropriate and percents are approximate.

## Cities and Towns are Making Their Own Plans

The open space sales tax revenue is shared by Larimer County and the six municipalities in the county.

Revenue sharing was specified in the ballot initiative to assure that funds benefit all county residents. Money is distributed based on population or sales tax generation, whichever is most beneficial to that town. Each town must use its money for open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, regional parks and trails. The dollar amounts listed include distributions during 1997 and to date.

### Berthoud: \$80,969 / \$152,123

Berthoud is examining its long-term needs for parks, open space, community buffer zones and trails. The town is also working with landowners to cooperatively preserve agricultural lands.

### Estes Park: \$178,198 / \$340,103

The Town has purchased an important 10-acre open space parcel near downtown. During 1998, Estes Park also will complete construction of the 4-mile paved Lake Estes trail.

### Fort Collins: \$2,320 million / \$4.42 million

Fort Collins purchased the 973-acre McKee Trust in the Corridor for \$2.54 million. The City also is also partnering with the county on various acquisitions and conservation projects around Fossil Creek Reservoir.

### Loveland: \$932,139 / \$2.63 million

During 1997, Loveland's Open Lands Commission developed its evaluation process for land purchases. Priorities include the Big Thompson River, the hogbacks, lakes, agricultural land and the corridor between Fort Collins as well as Berthoud.

### Timnath: \$4,646 / \$8,867

Timnath continues to save its funds for future open space projects. The town hopes to participate in regional partnership programs.

### Wellington: \$32,520 / \$62,368

Wellington is searching for 10 acres within the town for a park and has plans for new playgrounds at its two existing parks.



## Working Cooperatively with Landowners

The Open Lands Program works only with willing sellers. That is a condition stipulated in the Help Preserve Open Spaces initiative. We consider landowners to be partners in this program and all partnership relationships must be cooperative. The Larimer County Open Lands Program strives to achieve "win-win" solutions. Purchases must be fair for the landowner and fair for the Larimer County taxpayers.

The Open Lands staff can provide information and direction about estate planning, tax incentives and legal issues that landowners often need to consider.

### Identifying goals

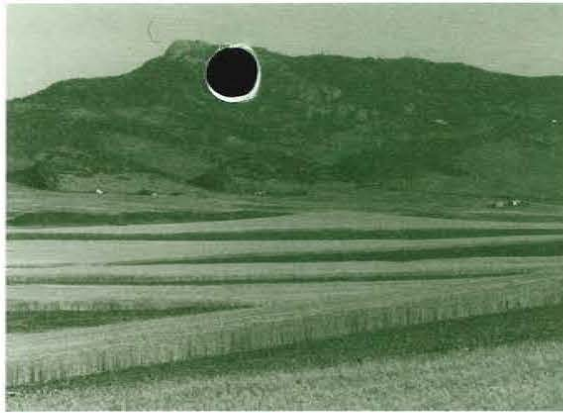
The acquisition process usually starts in one of two ways: Open Lands staff members contact landowners; or landowners contact us directly.

We start by discussing the goals the owner might have for the property. Some owners may want to sell outright, others might want to continue agriculture production or limit future development.

### Landowner options

Many programs are available to suit the needs of landowners.

- **Traditional sale:** Property sold outright to the Open Lands Program.
- **Conservation easement:** Larimer County purchases or accepts donation of development rights. The owner maintains ownership of the parcel and future development may be limited or eliminated. Public access may or may not be part of the easement agreement dependent on landowner wishes. The conservation easement is individually structured to meet your needs, and the county's.



Wheat fields against the Front Range mountain backdrop.

- **Reserved life estate:** Property is purchased by the Larimer County Open Lands Program and the landowner continues to live on the property for life.
- **Alternative large-parcel development:** With the help of the county's Rural Land Use Center, development plans can be designed to provide an owner incentives to subdivide property while retaining significant open space values to maintain the rural character. For more information call: 498-7683.

## The Corridor: From Dream to Reality

The corridor of farmland between Fort Collins and Loveland has long been viewed as a key area for growth management in Northern Colorado. There has always been a concern that the cities would grow together and be linked indistinguishably by urban sprawl. As far back as the late 1960s, concerned residents have discussed preservation of this corridor to keep these two cities separated yet linked by regional trails.



**Parks & Open Lands Department**  
1800 S. County Road 31  
Loveland, Colorado 80537  
970 679-4570

In 1998, dreams of early open-space visionaries may finally come to pass. Since 1996, more than 1,200 acres of land between Loveland and Fort Collins have been preserved through cooperative efforts of Larimer County, Fort Collins and Loveland. By the end of 1998, we hope to complete preservation of another 1,000 acres to create an agricultural buffer west of US 287. In addition to preserving a buffer, an opportunity has also been created for regional trails connecting the two cities.

Over the years there have been many discussions about preserving this corridor, and it was the passage of the Help Preserve Open Spaces initiative by county voters in 1995 that provided opportunity to develop a preservation plan. After a citizens' task force identified key properties, the county, Fort Collins and Loveland worked together and moved quickly to preserve land in this corridor for future generations.

By early 1997, the three entities purchased a 478-acre dryland wheat farm now known as Long View Farm that stretches north along Highway 287 for 1 mile. Then the city of Fort Collins purchased the McKee Trust, a 973-acre parcel that expands 1 mile to the west. Early in 1998, the county purchased another 121 acres adjacent to Long View Farm. In another cooperative effort currently underway, the three government agencies are working to protect another 1,000 acres that will provide a further connection to the west.

We also recognize that it is important to keep buffers between other cities in the region, including: Berthoud and Loveland, Fort Collins, Loveland and Windsor, and Wellington and Fort Collins. The Larimer County Open Lands Program has begun to cooperate with other towns in these areas for future preservation.