



Arapahoe County

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Board Summary Report

File #: 25-365

Agenda Date: 7/7/2025

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces Department

Prepared By:
Roger Harvey, Planning Manager, Open Spaces Department

Presenter: Roger Harvey, Planning Manager, Open Spaces Department

Subject:
1:30 PM *Draft Bijou Basin Master Plan Update

Purpose and Request:

Staff will present the draft Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). This will be an informational item. Staff anticipates requesting BOCC approval and adoption of the master plan in the Fall 2025.

Background and Discussion: Bijou Basin Open Space is located along West Bijou Creek in the central eastern part of Arapahoe County, at the junction of Quincy Avenue (CR30) and Bradbury Road (CR173) approximately 5 miles south of Byers, CO. Open Spaces purchased the 2,854-acre property in 2010 and in 2025 purchased an additional 362-acres adjacent to the 2010 purchase. Bijou Basin was purchased with the intention of being maintained as a working property with active grazing and dryland farming and to integrate passive recreation opportunities for the public to enjoy. Approximately half of the property is encumbered by two conservation easements held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust. The property is bordered by over 12,000 acres of adjacent conserved lands including the West Bijou Conservation Easement to the east and the County's Mule Gulch Open Space property to the south.

The property features short grass prairie and wildflowers, hidden canyons, geologic features and three miles of the winding West Bijou Creek. Broad and extensive cottonwood galleries fill the bottomlands with four seasons of color, along with upland pastures which support a diversity of wildlife and native shrubs such as juniper, scrub oak and wild plum. Open Spaces envisions the development of the property to be minimal and passive, primarily to allow visitors to experience a unique experience of the Colorado eastern plains.

We anticipate users to be primarily from the surrounding Byers, Bennett, Deer Trail, and Strasburg areas but also drawing some uses from Aurora, Denver, Centennial and Adams County.

The County hired Wenk Associates Inc. (Wenk) to help develop the Bijou Basin Open Space Master Planning process began in the spring of 2024. The overarching goal of the Master Plan is to strike a thoughtful balance between protecting and enhancing the site's natural resources, maintaining its role as a working agricultural property, and providing passive recreational amenities opportunities for both residents and regional visitors. The master planning process began in the spring of 2024 by conducting a cultural resource assessment, a

natural resource assessment, and an agricultural site assessment. These assessments established the baseline existing conditions and helped the County understand the opportunities and constraints of the property.

Community input is key to this project and the Project Team conducted eight months of broad community outreach and concept development for this project. and site analysis. The site analysis included a natural resource assessment, an agricultural management plan, multiple site visits, and GIS mapping. Community input was gathered through in-person events in Byers and Bennett, a virtual public meeting, stakeholder interviews, and two online surveys, which resulted in 590 surveys being completed. In addition, the County sent out 3,440 post cards to residents in the surrounding area to inform them about the project and upcoming events and the project website was visited 3700 times.

Based on what we heard from stakeholders and the community, three overarching themes emerged. They were to:

1. Protect natural resources and wildlife,
2. Respect local agricultural and rural communities, and
3. Celebrate and educate visitors about the eastern Colorado landscape. From these themes and public input, three initial master plan concepts were developed and presented to the public and staff for review.

The preferred master plan concept was developed from feedback received on the three initial concepts that were presented to the public during the second public engagement window as well as input received throughout the project. In addition to feedback received on the initial concepts, the final preferred concept is based on:

1. Achieving the County's goals for the property, which is to protect the existing natural resources, maintain the property as a working property in agriculture production, and provide passive recreation opportunities for the public,
2. The ability to maintain the conservation values of the conservation easement held by the Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust,
3. Opportunities and constraints identified in the natural resource assessment and the agricultural assessment,
4. Ability for County staff to maintain the property, and
5. Availability of other recreation opportunities in central Arapahoe County.

The preferred concept includes:

1. Four trail loops that provide a variety of trail mileage and trail experiences, highlighting the shortgrass prairie and riparian creek corridor
2. Trails that are accessible to hikers and equestrians to minimize impacts to grazing and farming operations, protect natural resources, and reduce potential visitor conflicts, and
3. Trailhead and on trail amenities such as the parking lot, shelter, and primitive restroom, and
4. The potential for expansion of future programming and on-trail amenities.

Fiscal Impact: N/A

Alternatives: N/A

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

- ☒ Be fiscally sustainable
- ☐ Provide essential and mandated service
- ☒ Be community focused

Staff Recommendation: N/A

Concurrence: N/A