

BIJOU BASIN OPEN SPACE

MASTER PLAN

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* Included as separate document

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Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT)

Bijou Basin Open Space Neighbors and Lessees
- A group of four people (three men and one woman) standing behind a table with project materials and a sign that says "PLACE YOUR COMMENT CARDS HERE!". The people are smiling and appear to be at a public engagement event. The table has various items on it, including a sign, a clipboard, and some papers.
- BIJOU BASIN OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN | ARAPAHOE COUNTY OPEN SPACES
- 2



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bijou Basin Open Space, a 3,100-acre property located along West Bijou Creek in central eastern Arapahoe County, was acquired by Arapahoe County Open Spaces to both preserve the natural resources and agricultural uses and to provide passive recreational opportunities. The site features expansive shortgrass prairie and wildflowers, diverse habitat for wildlife, and approximately three miles of the meandering West Bijou Creek. Its bottomlands are lined with broad cottonwood galleries that change with the seasons and upland pastures that support native vegetation, including shortgrass prairie, juniper, scrub oak, and wild plum.

The Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan process began in the spring of 2024 and was completed in the fall of 2025. The Master Plan envisions minimal development to accommodate passive recreation, which allows visitors to experience the area’s natural beauty and the West Bijou Creek basin’s sinuous streams. Primary users are expected to come from nearby communities such as Byers, Bennett, Deer Trail, and Strasburg, with some visitors from Aurora, Centennial, Denver, and surrounding areas.

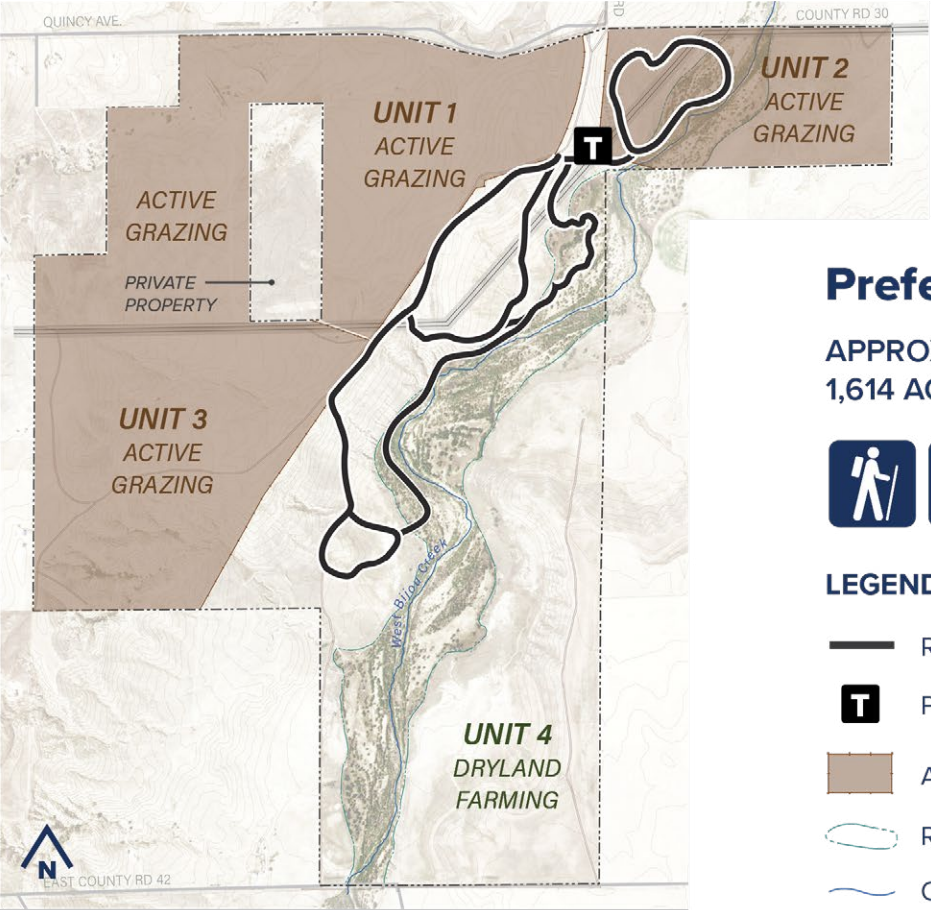
Portions of the site are currently under agricultural and grazing leases, which will continue when the site is open to recreation, providing visitors a firsthand experience of the working lands that define eastern Arapahoe County.

The overarching goal of the Master Plan is to strike a thoughtful balance between protecting the site’s natural resources, maintaining the site’s role as a working agricultural landscape, and providing passive recreational amenities for both local residents and regional visitors. The Master Plan honors and respects the rural lifestyle of

Eastern Arapahoe County. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to educate visitors about the community’s culture and values.

To guide the planning process, Arapahoe County Open Spaces and the consultant team, led by Wenk Associates, conducted broad community outreach and site analysis. This 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, and two online surveys.

This document summarizes the findings from the site analysis and public engagement process and presents preliminary recommendations for the future use and development of Bijou Basin Open Space. Recognizing the need to balance recreation with ongoing agricultural operations and the sensitivity of the site’s resources, the recommendations outlined here are intended to be adaptive, evolving over time as the site opens and user patterns emerge.



Preferred Plan

APPROXIMATELY 7 MILES OF TRAILS
1,614 ACRES OF GRAZING



LEGEND

- RECREATIONAL TRAIL
- PROPOSED TRAILHEAD
- ACTIVE GRAZING
- RIPARIAN ZONE
- CREEK

Plan Highlights

- Trails are designated for hikers and equestrians to minimize conflicts with active grazing operations and reduce impacts on natural resources. To support these goals, dogs and bicycles are not allowed.
- Four trail loops provide a variety of trail mileage and trail experiences, highlighting the shortgrass prairie and riparian creek corridor.
- Active grazing acreage is preserved to maintain existing agricultural operations.
- Trails and amenity areas are designed to sit lightly on the site to balance natural resource protection and passive recreation.



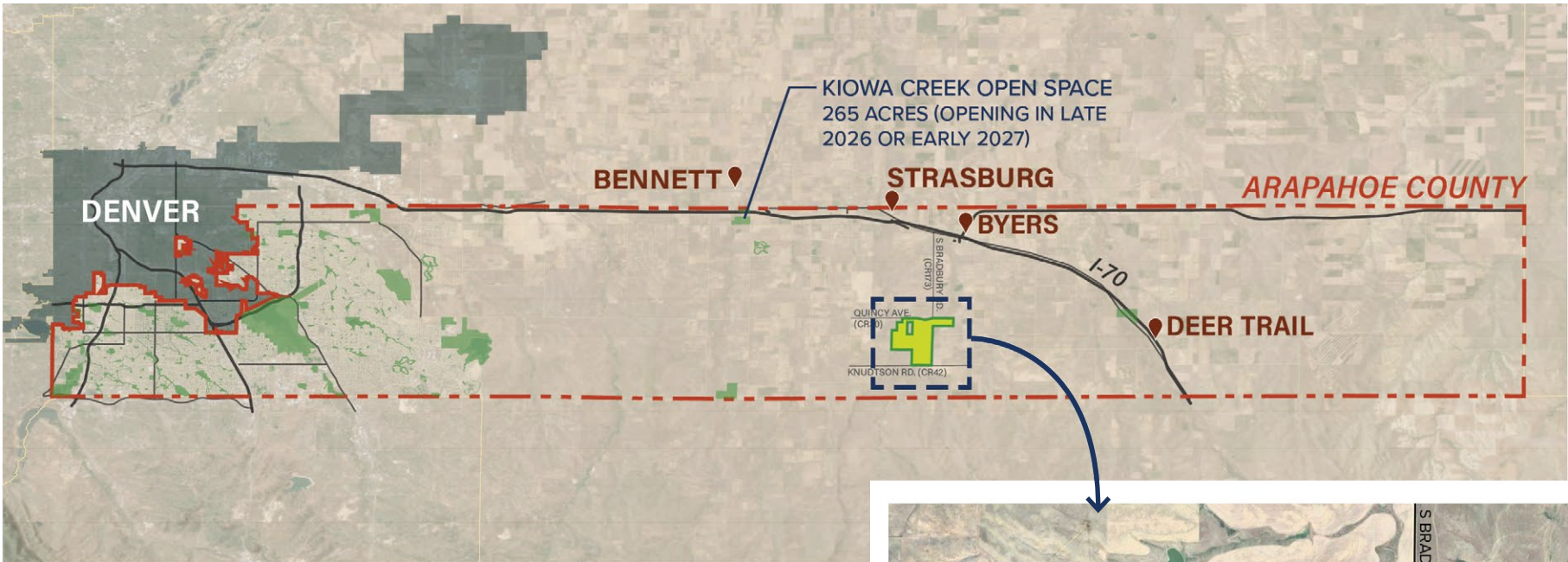


PROJECT INTRODUCTION

SITE CONTEXT

Bijou Basin Open Space is located about six and a half miles south of Byers at the junction of Quincy Avenue (CR30) and Bradbury Road (CR173). The 3,100 acre property was purchased by Arapahoe County with Open Space Sales and Use Tax funds. Roughly 2,854 acres was purchased in 2010, and an additional 362 acres in January 2025. The property includes two conservation easements held by the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust totaling 1,470 acres. The land is adjacent to several additional parcels of conservation land that totals nearly 12,000 acres combined. The Bijou Basin property is currently closed to the public and is used for cattle grazing and dryland farming.

Once the Bijou Basin Master Plan is implemented and the property opened to the public, visitors will be able to explore acres of rolling hills tucked into the heart of the basin. These open lands feature shortgrass prairie and wildflowers as well as cottonwoods and other native growth along the winding creek bed of West Bijou Creek. Based on a public engagement-led design process, future amenities will include a trailhead with gravel parking, picnic area, primitive restrooms, and a trail system for hikers and equestrians.



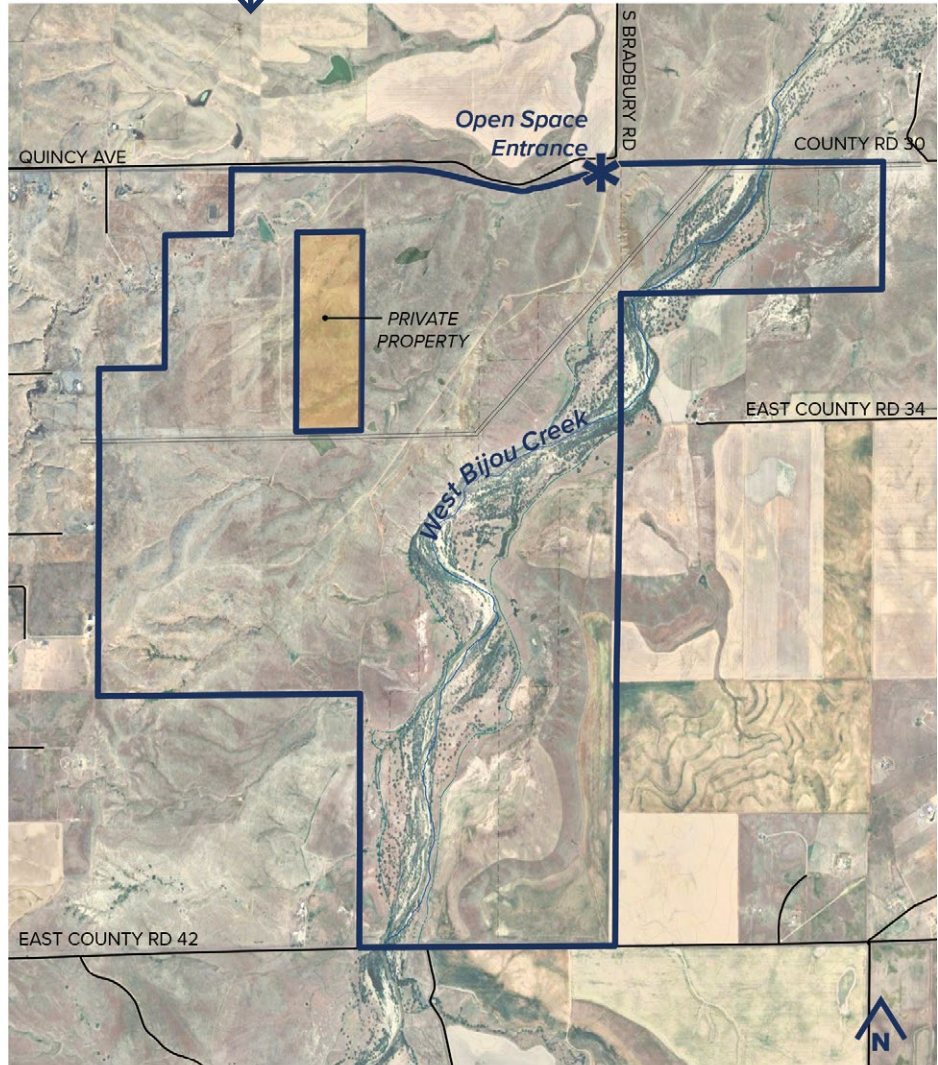
Regional Context

Bijou Basin Open Space

3,100 ACRES

6.5 miles, 10-minute drive from Byers

54 miles, 1-hour drive from Denver



Site Boundary - Bijou Basin Open Space



EASTERN ARAPAHOE COUNTY RECREATION INVENTORY

Bijou Basin Open Space is an exciting, new part of an open space and parks network in eastern Arapahoe County that showcases the expansive landscapes of eastern Colorado. Recreation at these open spaces are developed to balance with historic and existing land uses on site. These open spaces provide additional amenities to supplement the passive and lower recreational use recommended at Bijou Basin Open Space.

Four Acre Park is a 4-acre neighborhood park located in Strasburg that offers a playground, soccer field, and baseball field.

Bennett Regional Park and Open Space is a roughly 300-acre recreational area that provides residents and visitors a playground, trails, and fishing pond. Dogs are allowed, bikes are restricted.

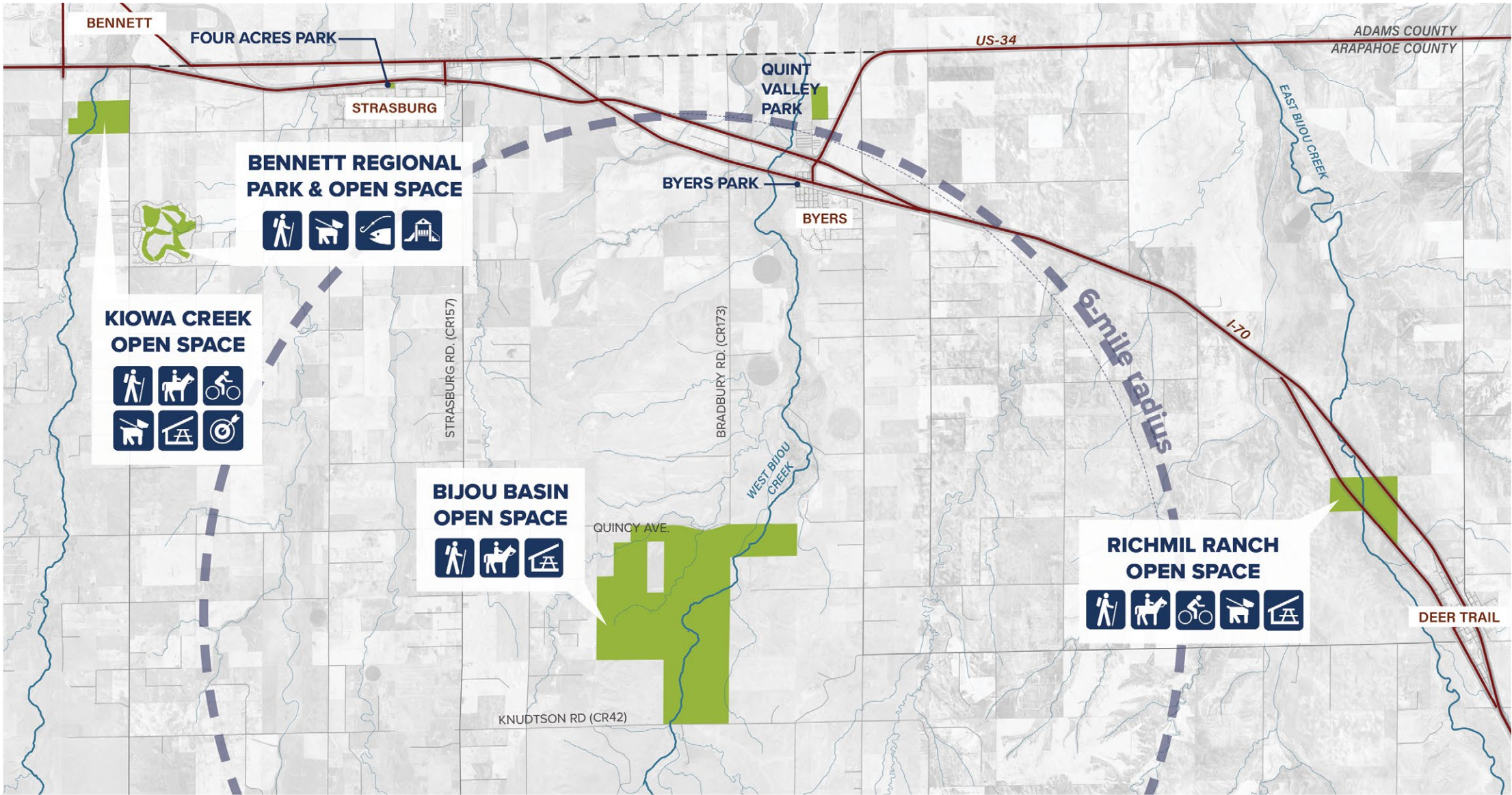
Byers Park is a newly renovated, approximately 1-acre neighborhood park in the Town of Byers offering an updated playground, grassy play area with walking path, and a covered picnic pavilion. The park is open to dogs and bikes, not motorized vehicles.

Quint Valley Park is an 80-acre fairgrounds facility owned by Byers Park & Recreation District that includes a camping area, rodeo arena, and event center.

Kiowa Creek Open Space is a new, 265-acre open space located near the Town of Bennett set to open to the public in late 2026 or early 2027. The open space will feature multi-use trails, a creek boardwalk, an equestrian challenge course, outdoor classrooms, picnic areas, and an archery range.

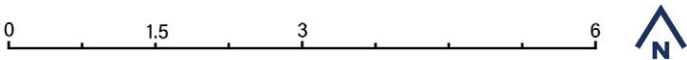
Richmil Ranch is a 352-acre open space located near the Town of Deer Trail that features trails for walking, running, biking, and horseback riding, all set within a former farm property.

Bijou Basin Open Space will be a 3,100 acre open space offering recreational access for hiking, trail running, and horseback riding to honor the more conservation-minded and agricultural character of the property. This approach supports a balanced integration of low-impact recreation with the protection of natural resources, grazing, and dryland farming operations currently active on site.



Eastern Arapahoe County Open Space Network

 PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE + PARKS



PROJECT GOALS & VISION

Project Vision

The Bijou Basin Open Space master plan seeks to prioritize the protection of ongoing agricultural operations and ecological integrity while introducing low-impact public recreation to the site. The vision of the project is captured in four main project goals as shown below. Based on the existing land uses and the low and open topography of the site, passive recreation can bring visitors onto the site without significant disturbance to the ecosystem, landscape, or grazing and farming operations.



Project Goals

- 1) *Balance the current and future land uses on the site.*
- 2) *Protect ecological habitat.*
- 3) *Maintain active agricultural practices including sustainable farming and grazing operations.*
- 4) *Integrate appropriate passive recreation.*



SITE INVENTORY & ANALYSIS

Conservation

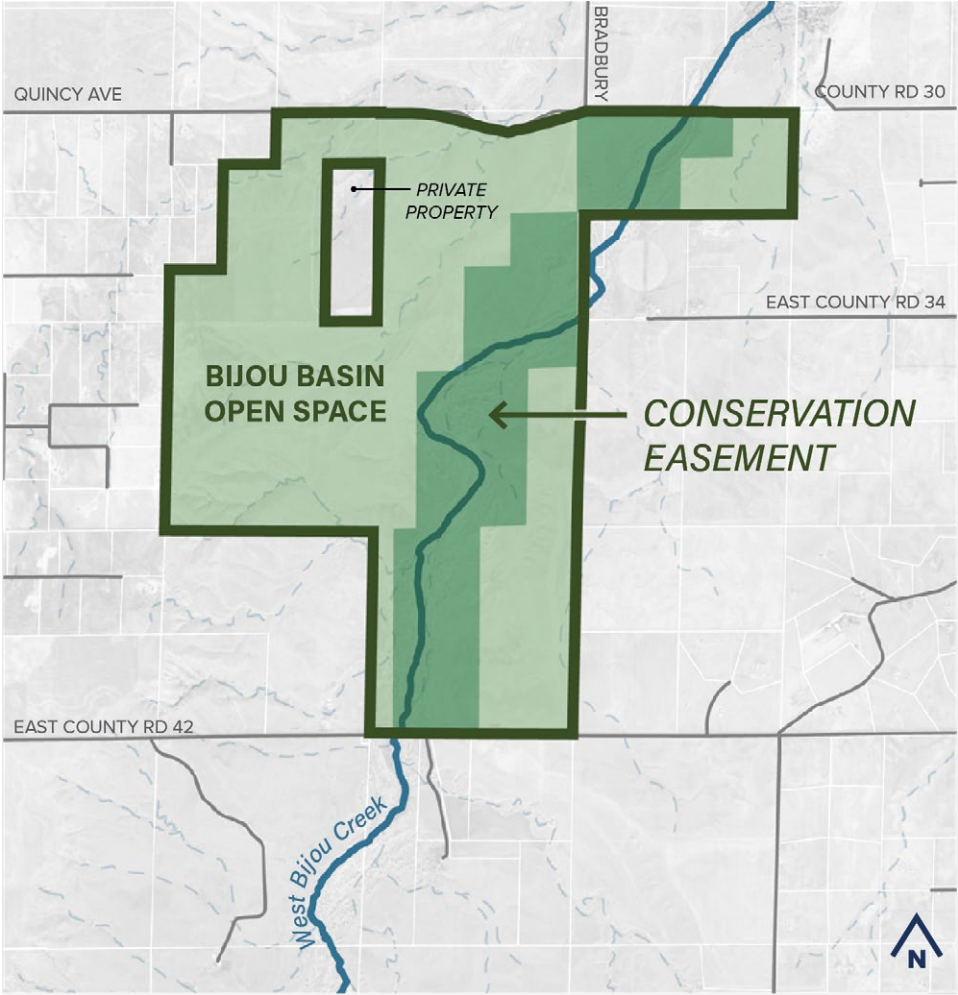
As part of the protection of natural resources on the Bijou Basin property, there are two existing conservation easements which covers approximately half of the property (1,470 acres) and are held by the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT). As seen in the map to the right, the two conservation easements cover the riparian corridor and floodplain surrounding West Bijou Creek as it meanders through the site.

Phase 1 Assessments

In the first phase of the project, a series of detailed land assessments were completed to inform the planning and design process. An agricultural report was prepared to study the productivity of existing agricultural operations on site and the potential for expansion. A natural resource assessment was prepared to inventory vegetation communities, evaluate the quality of wildlife habitats, and study the condition on the riparian corridor. Additionally, a cultural resource assessment was performed to determine if sensitive cultural resources were present on site. Findings from all three assessments were incorporated into the planning of trails and amenity areas to reduce potential impacts on the site’s historic and ecological resources. More information on the recommendations of the agricultural and natural resources assessments are provided on the following pages.

Site Visits

The planning team also conducted a series of site visits to inventory the landscape and become familiarized with the layout of existing grazing units and farming operations on property. Later in the design process, additional site visits were carried out to test proposed trails in relation to the site’s topography. The information gained from on-ground site investigations helped to inform and refine the master planning recommendations and, ultimately, the final design concept.



SITE ASSESSMENTS

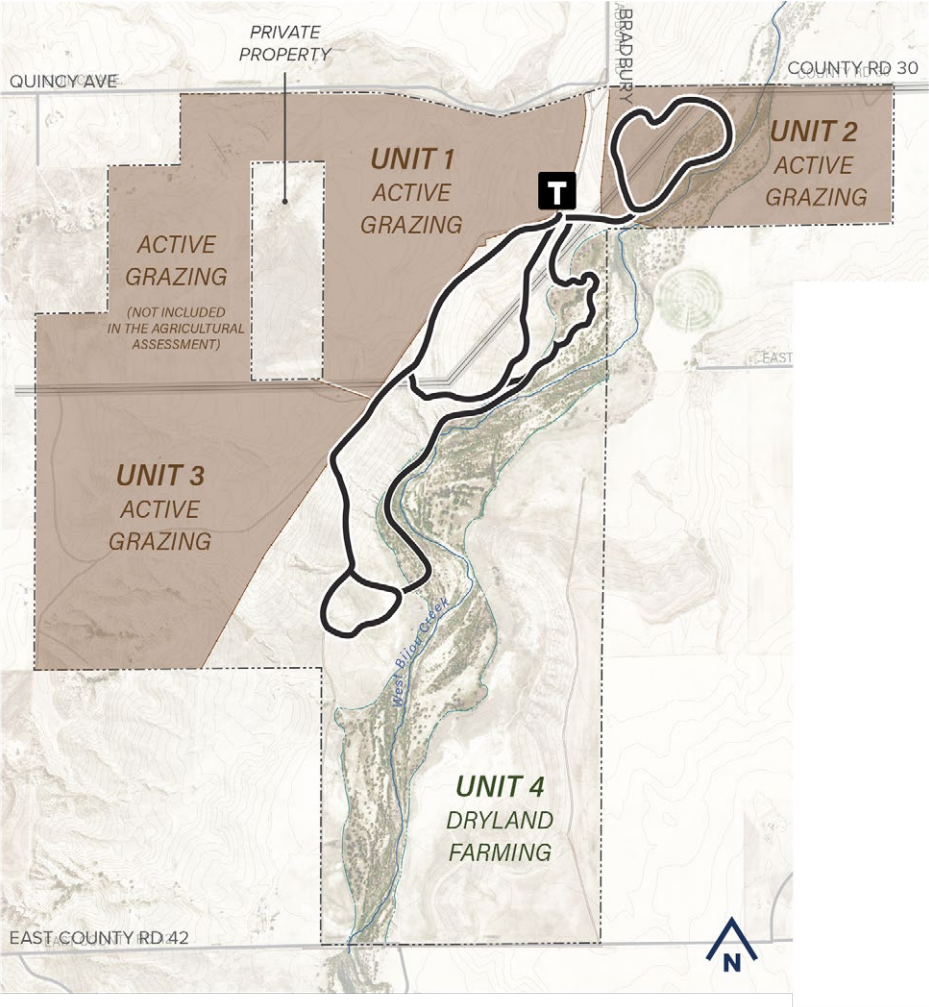
Agriculture

The Bijou Basin property has a history of cattle grazing and agricultural use that continues today. Approximately 1,650 acres, or 50%, of the property is used for grazing or cultivation and is managed by two lessees. A primary goal of the master plan is to maintain and protect the site’s agricultural heritage and support continued operations. Lessees were actively engaged in the project to provide insight and guidance on the introduction of recreation as to not adversely affect ongoing agricultural operations on the property.

The site contains four separately fenced agricultural units that are used for grazing and one unfenced unit for dryland farming. Two herds currently graze across four units in the northwestern and northeastern portions of the site. The herds rotationally graze in units 1 and 3 for six months, typically May through October. In fall, the herds are co-mingled in unit 2 from September to November, depending on available forage. During this time, calves and their mothers may be present in Unit 2, requiring more separation of recreational users from this area to avoid conflicts with cattle who may be protective of their young. Much of the eastern half of Unit 4 is occupied by dryland farming fields, managed under a wheat–millet–fallow crop rotation.

The agricultural assessment investigated current farming practices, the quality of existing forage, and grazing capacity to support potential expansion of operations. The assessment concluded that the current grazing regime is sustainable and that the existing dryland farming operation remains profitable in years with adequate rainfall, with opportunities for expansion in Unit 4. Based on soil characteristics and associated costs, the assessment did not recommend the purchase of an irrigation system.

The development of longer-term leases was recommended to encourage greater stewardship of sustainable farming practices such as erosion control and no-till techniques. Accordingly, the County is considering increasing the agricultural leases to 5-7 years moving into the future. The report also recommended continuing moderate stocking rates while identifying the potential for further subdivision of pasture units to increase rotational grazing, altering the starting order of grazing units each spring, and the incorporation of additional grazing practices such as intensified grazing (also known as flash grazing).



Active Cattle Grazing
1,634 acres (UNITS 1, 2, 3, & NEW ACQUISITION)



Existing Dryland Farming
370 acres (UNIT 4)

SITE ASSESSMENTS

Vegetation Communities

A natural resource assessment was performed in the spring of 2024 to provide information on the vegetation communities, wildlife, and their habitats found on site. Field work documented plant composition within the shortgrass prairie and riparian habitats; assessed the prevalence of noxious weeds; analyzed habitat for federally threatened and endangered species; and evaluated high-quality grazing areas.

The property is primarily comprised of shortgrass prairie (approximately 2,092 acres or 65%) and, to a lesser extent, floodplains and croplands surrounding West Bijou Creek. This community is diverse and relatively undisturbed despite the long history of cattle grazing on site. Primary plant species found within the shortgrass prairie habitat include soapweed yucca (*Yucca glauca*), blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*), and Canadian horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*).

The Western Great Plains Riparian/Floodplain vegetation community is the other major habitat type found on site, present alongside the West Bijou Creek and occupying 488 acres or 15% of the site. Within the floodplain, small areas of emergent wetlands, deposited sandbars, and cottonwood galleries are found along the shores of the creek. Primary species found within the riparian corridor

include sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*), common threesquare (*Schoenoplectus pungens*), and reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*). Prominent non-native plants within this habitat area include cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*).

The West Bijou Creek has the potential for flooding, as witnessed by the recent flood event in July 2023 when floodwaters reached over 6 feet high. The flood event significantly altered the creek’s forested floodplain, resulting in high erosion and tree die-off. A study of the riparian corridor, performed as part of the natural resource assessment, evaluated the condition of the cottonwood forest, and found significant regrowth and wetland reestablishment one year after flooding. Areas of high erosion remain in the southern portion of the creek.

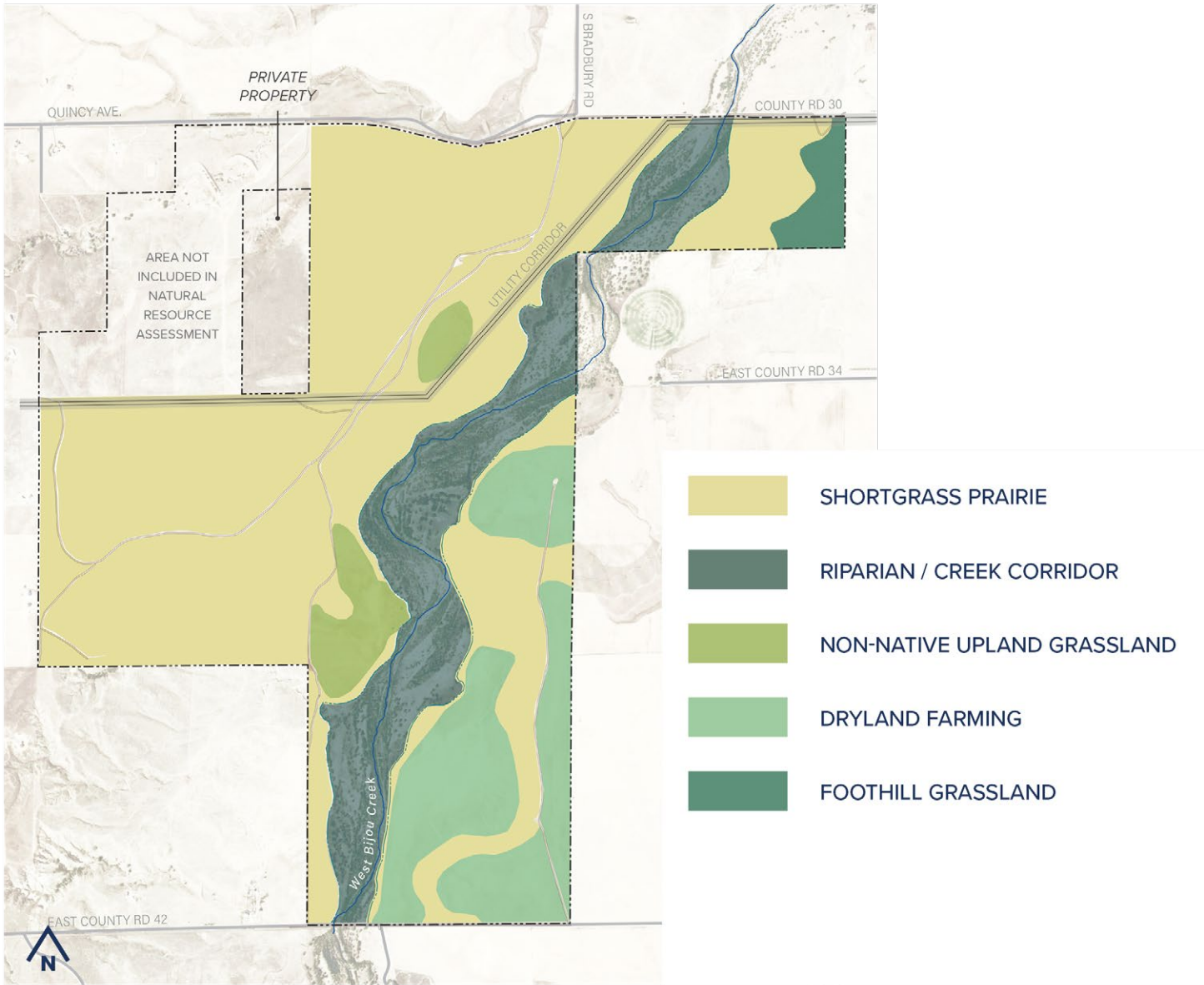
To address flood damage, the assessment recommends planting cottonwood saplings to reestablish and diversify the tree canopy, monitoring wetland reestablishment, and minimizing impacts from grazing and trail development on the creek corridor. If development does occurs within the riparian corridor, standing dead trees and flood debris should be removed for visitor safety.



Shortgrass Prairie - 1,733 acres



Riparian - 488 acres

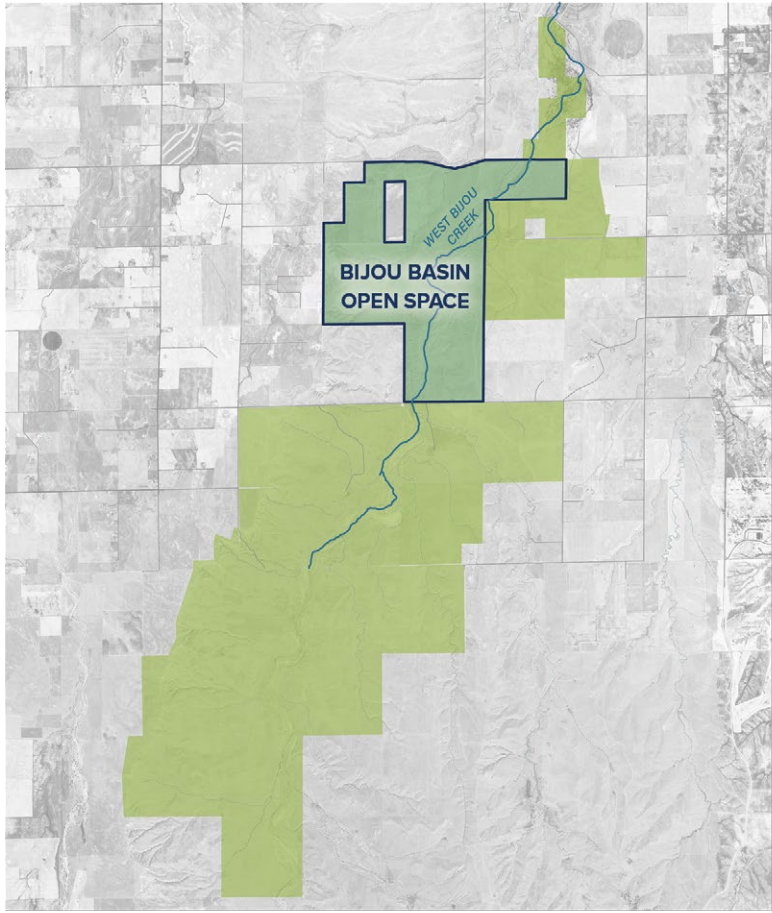


SITE ASSESSMENTS

Wildlife

Bijou Basin is located adjacent to a number of conservation properties and easements, and contributes to an extensive, contiguous area of shortgrass prairie and plains riparian habitat encompassing approximately 12,000 acres. A variety of local wildlife species utilize this network of protected lands, including pronghorn, mule deer, white tail deer, wild turkey, black-tailed prairie dogs, porcupine, bald eagles, a wide variety of grassland birds, raptors, and migratory shorebirds.

An inventory of wildlife species and quality of wildlife habitats at Bijou Basin was prepared as part of the natural resource assessment. Areas previously used for agriculture, including fallow fields in the southwestern portion of the site, show signs of disturbance to the native prairie plant composition and the spread of noxious weeds. However, the abundance of pronghorn and mule deer observed during site visits indicates fair to good quality grassland habitat, particularly in the northern portions of the property.



Surrounding Conservation Lands



Pronghorn
(*Antilocapra americana*)



Wild Turkey
(*Meleagris gallopavo*)



Black-tailed Prairie Dogs
(*Cynomys ludovicianus*)



Common Lesser Earless Lizard
(*Holbrookia maculata*)



Mule Deer
(*Odocoileus hemionus*)



Bald Eagle
(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



Porcupine
(*Erethizon dorsatum*)



Lincoln's Sparrow
(*Melospiza lincolnii*)



Broad-Winged Hawk
(*Buteo platypterus*)

SITE ASSESSMENTS

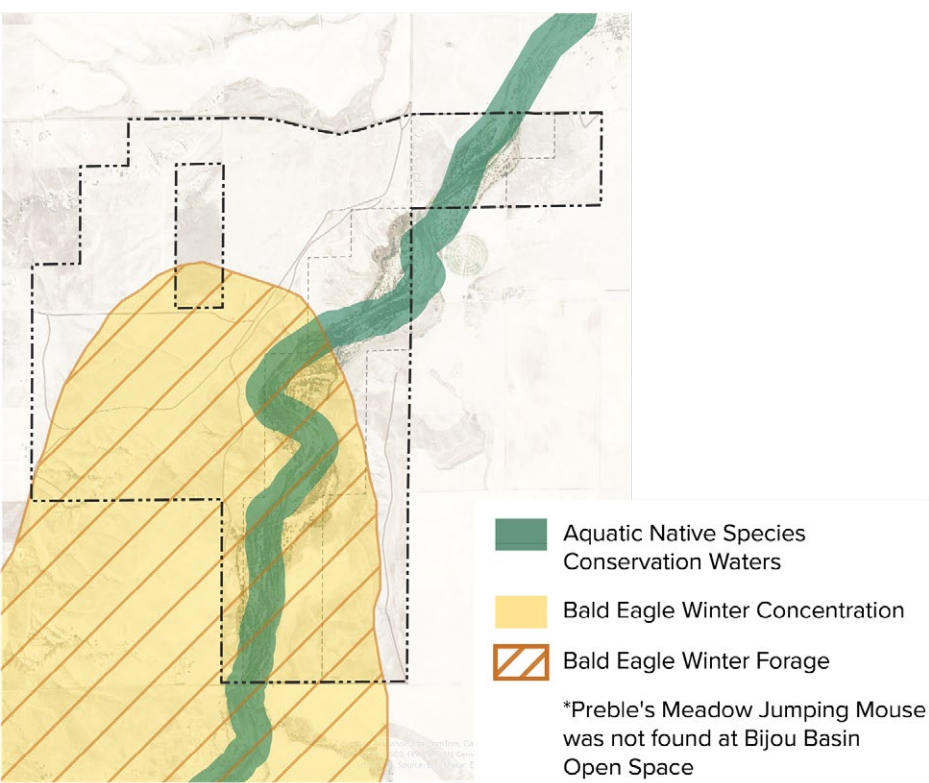
Wildlife Habitat

Habitat areas and migration corridors for wildlife species of ecological importance and concern were identified as part of the natural resource assessment. Maps on this page depict approximate migration corridors and habitat ranges for wildlife species known to frequent the Bijou Basin property, including bald eagle, wild turkey, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and pronghorn. These maps provide a view of how wildlife may be moving through the property and highlight areas to mitigate ecological impacts when siting recreational trails.

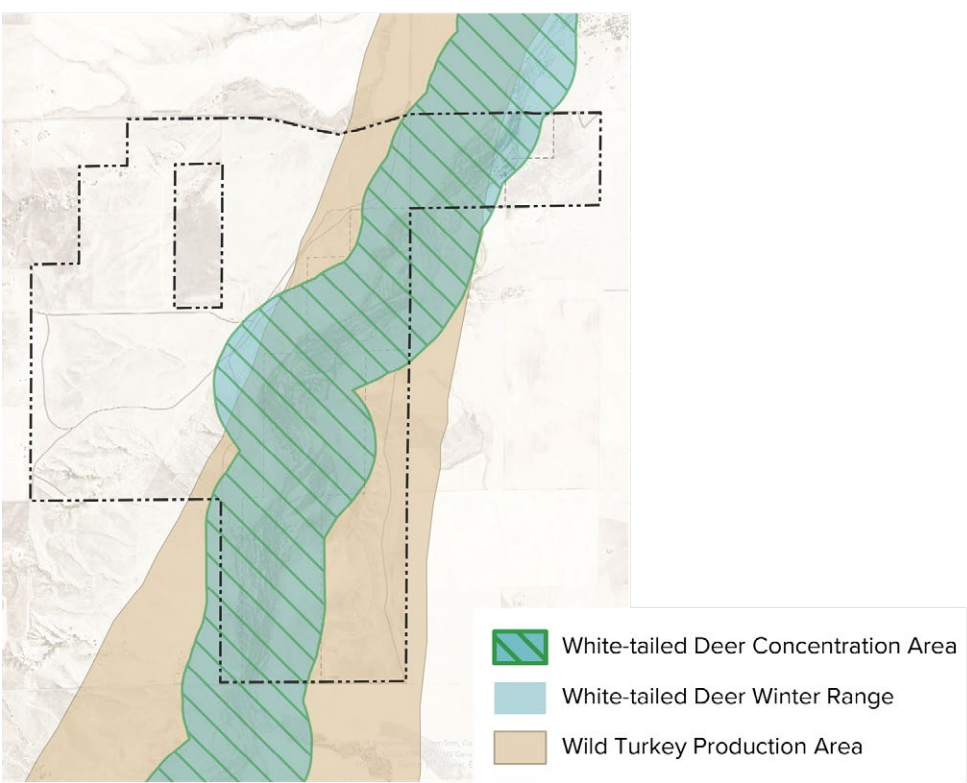
Large wildlife species such as white-tailed deer, mule deer, and wild turkey typically migrate along the riparian corridor. Additionally, the cottonwood gallery forest surrounding the creek provides important hunting habitat for raptors, such as eagles, hawks, and kestrels.

Care was taken during the master planning process to locate major amenity areas such as the gravel parking lots and trailhead amenity area outside of these migration corridors. Proposed trails traversing the floodplain and providing visitor access to the creek are designed for minimal site disturbance and are intended to have a low impact on these sensitive habitat areas.

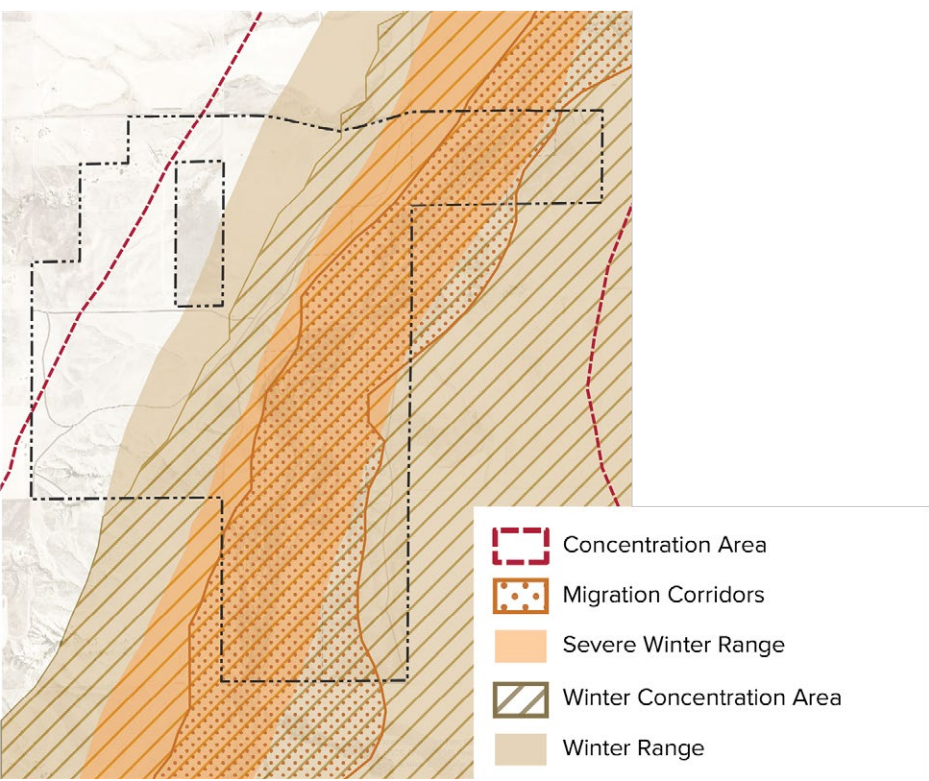
Eagle and Preble Mouse Habitat



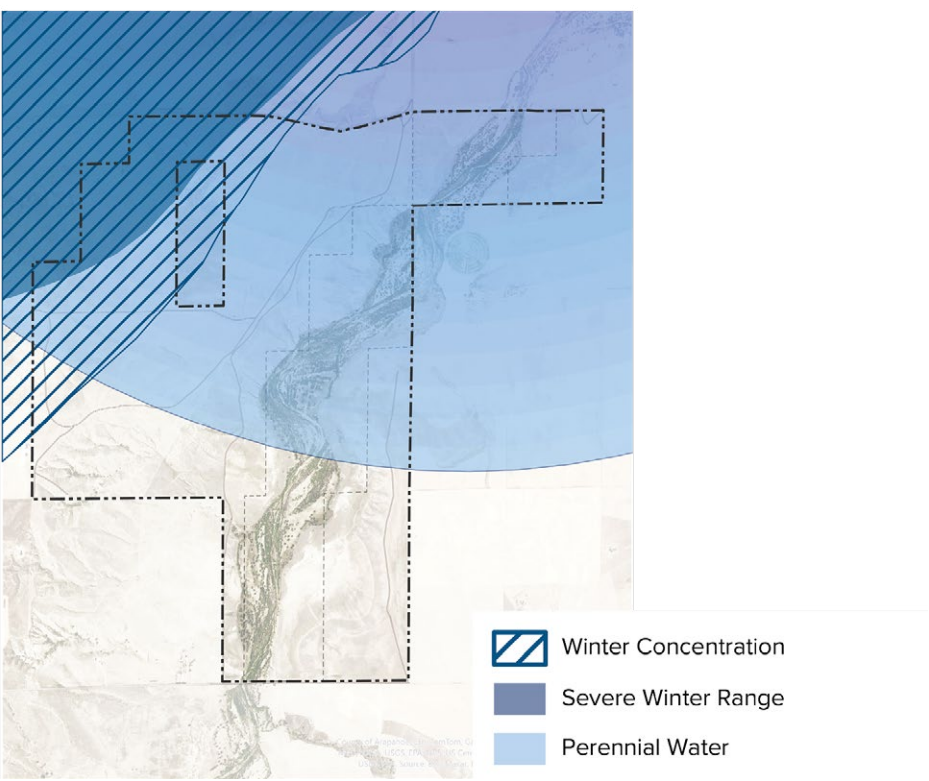
White-tailed Deer and Wild Turkey Habitat



Mule Deer Habitat



Pronghorn Habitat





PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Overview

Through a year-long community engagement process, the project team connected with eastern residents of the County and provided multiple opportunities for both the local and broader communities to be heard and provide feedback on the future design of Bijou Basin Open Space. Three public engagement windows helped to inform the creation of a master plan for the site.

The first window of engagement raised awareness of the project and the County’s intention to open a portion of the 3,000+ acre property for public access while minimizing ecological impacts and maintaining active grazing and agricultural operations on the property. The feedback collected in this window informed the creation of three design alternatives for the community to view and provide additional input in a second window of engagement. From this input, a preferred preliminary master plan for the open space property was created and presented for a third round of public comment.

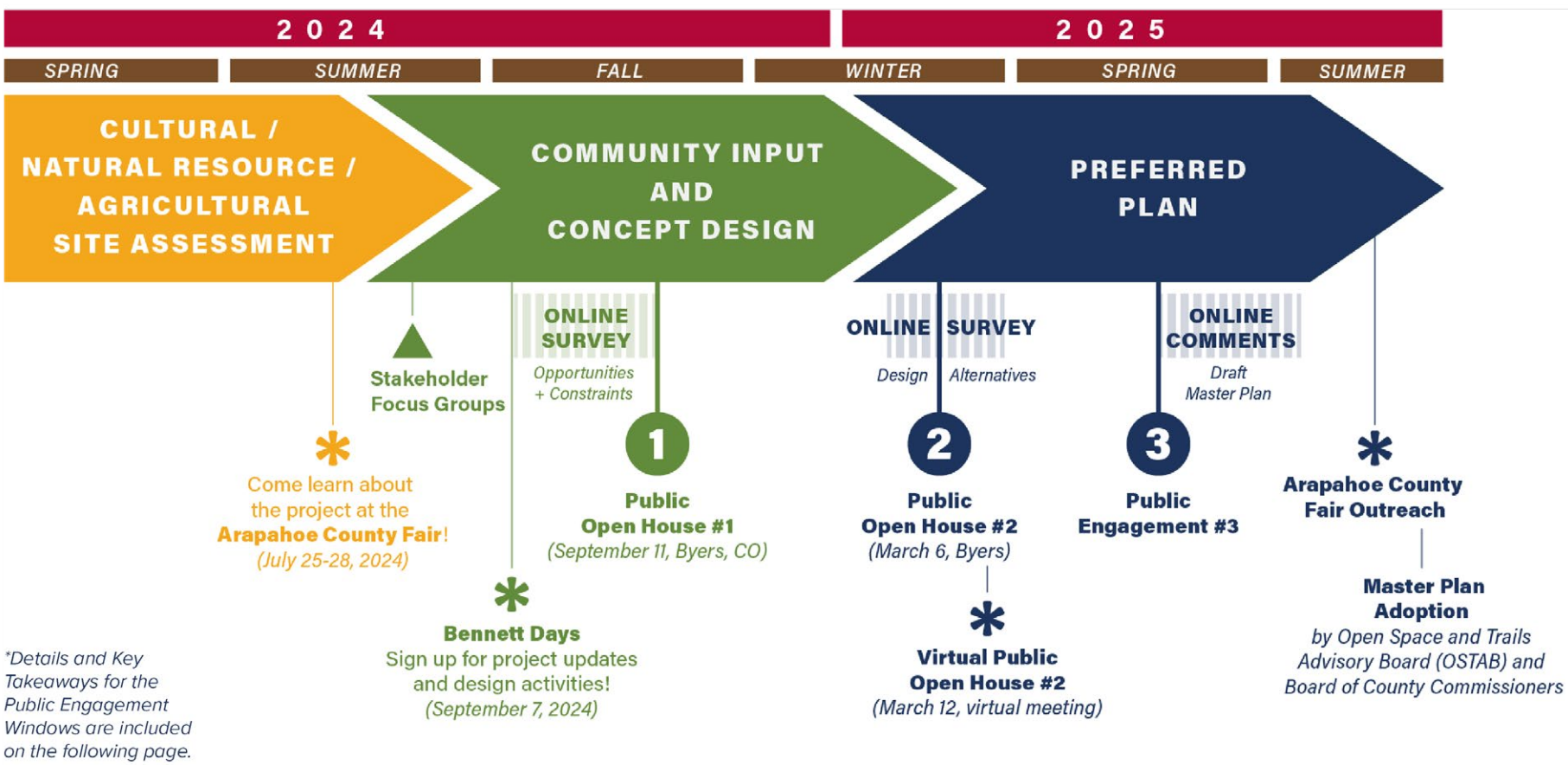
Outreach included a range of targeted and broad methods, such as a project website with ongoing updates; direct letters to and phone calls with adjacent residents; online surveys; staffing tables at local and County fairs and festivals; and in-person and virtual community meetings. Outreach activities were promoted using postcards mailed directly to County residents within six miles of Bijou Basin Open Space, social media, news articles, emails to a growing list of people signed up to receive project updates, yard signs placed in the four local communities of Byers, Bennett, Deer Trail and Strasburg; and calls and emails to civic and community groups such as local school district leaders, birding groups, local town councils, and local fire departments.

Many positive comments were received throughout the process in online surveys, direct emails, at community meetings, and in the final comment card. People appreciated the multiple opportunities to stay in touch and provide ongoing input toward the creation of the master plan.

Goals For Engagement

- 1) Listen to the community.
- 2) Communicate vision and decision-making process.
- 3) Create opportunities for the community to provide their feedback on the master plan.

Project Timeline



Bennett Days



Public Open House #1



Public Open House #2

OUTREACH & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Engagement Events

Public Engagement Window #1 Events

ARAPAHOE COUNTY FAIR - Aurora, CO
JULY 25-28, 2024 - Project Announcement

BENNETT DAYS - Bennett, CO
SEPTEMBER 7, 2024 - Interactive Pop-Up

OPEN HOUSE #1 - Byers, CO
SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 - Local Event

Team members attended the Arapahoe County Fair and Bennett Days, and hosted the first public open house in Byers, CO. These events provided opportunities for sharing information on site opportunities and constraints, and gathering input on desired activities and amenities. Feedback was gathered from 30 attendees at the first open house and 432 online survey responses.

Public Engagement Window #2 Events

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE #2 - Byers, CO
MARCH 6, 2025 - Concept Alternatives

VIRTUAL PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE #2
MARCH 12, 2025 - Concept Alternatives

The second open house was held at the Kelter Library in Byers. Three alternative design concepts were presented and feedback was gathered from approximately 30 attendees. The team also



Bennett Days

facilitated a virtual public open house to present design alternatives. Approximately 15 people attended. Additionally, public input was received via 160 online survey responses.

Public Engagement Window #3 Events

ARAPAHOE COUNTY FAIR - Aurora, CO
JULY 24-27, 2025 - Presented Preferred Plan

Returning a year later, the Preferred Plan was on display to the general public at the Arapahoe County Fair. An estimated 75 attendees visited the table and feedback was gathered from conversations with approximately 30 attendees. The Preferred Plan was also posted to the project website and 44 comments were received via the online comment card.

Points of Contact

- 3,761** Project Web Visits
- 3,447** Project Postcards Sent
- 636** Comment Card/Online Survey Responses
- 363** Mailing List Sign-Ups
- 96** Stakeholder Letters Sent
- 7** Phone Interviews with Lessees and Adjacent Landowners
- 6** Engagement Events

What We Heard : Key Takeaways

The following themes emerged during the engagement process and were carried into the Preferred Plan.

1) Protection of natural resources remains the top priority.

- Balancing the impacts from opening recreational access with the protection of natural resources, wildlife, and existing agricultural operations on site remained the most important public concern throughout the engagement process.
- Public support varied for bikes and dogs on site. The County assessed its operational capacity to manage on-leash dogs and bikes in a manner that protects active grazing, agricultural uses, and sensitive habitats on site, especially those within conservation easements. Based on management needs it was determined that bikes and dogs will not be allowed on site. This decision is proposed to limit conflicts on trails, protect livestock, respect the rural working lands, and ensure that the conservation values of the property are protected.

2) Respect local agricultural and rural communities.

- The public is concerned with issues such as trespassing, misuse, and rule enforcement. Suggestions included incorporating signage on property rules and providing staffing to manage the security and maintenance of the site.
- When developing plans to open the site to public recreation, consider impacts on local traffic from increased visitorship to the area.
- Based on public interest, the County is considering a limited hunting program carried out in partnership with a non-profit partner that focuses on mentor hunting and education. Potential programming would be limited to chaperoned trips, hunting safety, and ethics. Additional research and stakeholder discussions are underway to determine feasibility and next steps.
- As horseback riding is a common pastime in local communities of eastern Arapahoe County, there is strong interest in equestrian trails. The public is interested in separate equestrian trailer and vehicular parking, regardless if they are in the same location, to ensure the safety of all visitors.

3) Celebrate the eastern Colorado landscape through passive recreation.

- A variety of trail experiences was preferred by the public. The public is interested in incorporating rest areas, such as benches, along trails.
- Provide educational opportunities through programming, special events, and educational signage about the site's history and ecology.

4) Overall feedback about the preferred plan and trails was positive.

- Some community members expressed interest in additional trail mileage. Extending trail lengths could be a consideration for the future, pending operational feasibility.





MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL PREFERRED PLAN

Recreational access at Bijou Basin Open Space will include hiking, trail running, and horseback riding. This is designed to complement the site’s conservation significance and working, agricultural landscape. An approximately seven mile trail network comprised of four smaller loops will provide a variety of experiences for different ages and abilities while protecting the site’s natural resources and agricultural operations.

Design Recommendations

Site Access

- Utilize the northern site entrance to provide access from Byers and the I-70 corridor. Developing recreational access in the north of the property preserves the lower half of the site for agriculture and conservation.
- Site parking and trailhead areas to minimize impacts on grazing units, avoid interference with local traffic, and maintain visibility from Quincy Avenue for safety and property maintenance. The proposed parking location draws visitors into the site at a high point, providing a more welcoming arrival experience near the trailhead with expansive views of the prairie and riparian corridor below.
- Design parking areas to provide separation of equestrian and regular vehicular traffic to minimize conflicts and improve safety. Locate parking areas to minimize site disturbance, grading, and habitat fragmentation.
- Open recreational access to hiking and equestrians to align with the goal of developing low-impact recreation on a working agricultural property protected by conservation easements.

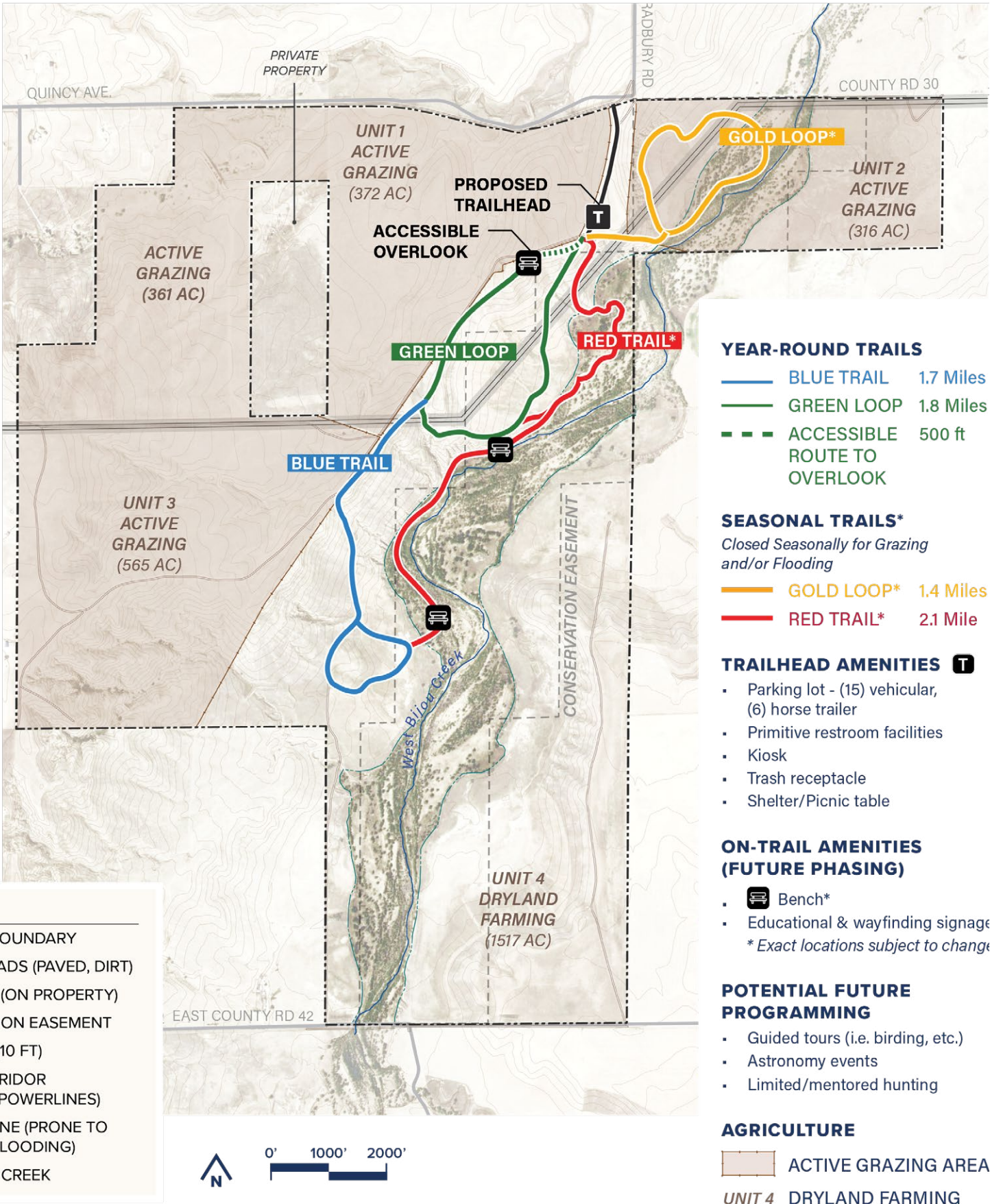
Trails

- Locate trails to minimize impacts to existing agricultural operations and natural resources. Avoid steep slopes and areas of high erosion along the creek corridor.

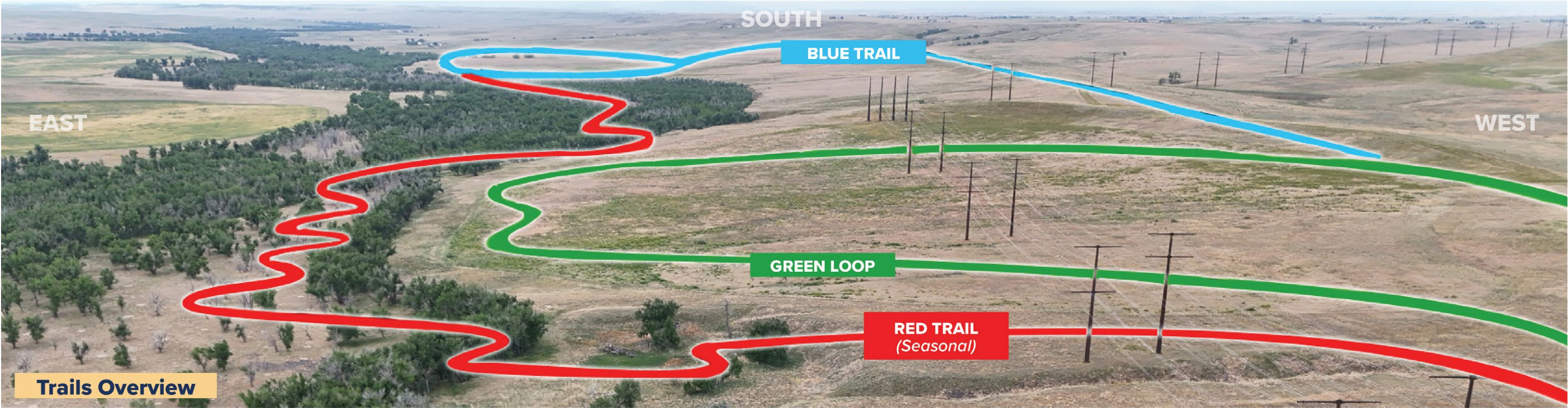
- Utilize existing maintenance roads for trails to the extent possible. New soft surface trails should minimize impacts on the landscape.
- Prioritize trail placement in areas outside of active grazing units whenever possible to support ongoing agricultural operations. Trails located within agricultural units may require seasonal closures to minimize conflicts between visitors and cattle, especially during calving season.
- Plan for potential seasonal closures of trails within the creek corridor due to flooding and weather events. Develop signage to clearly alert visitors of temporary closures for public safety.

Amenities and Programming

- Design trailhead and on-trail amenities to be low maintenance. Use appropriate materials, keeping with a naturalized aesthetic consistent with the rural character of eastern Arapahoe County.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a limited hunting program in response to local interest received during the public engagement process.
- Develop partnerships for programming and special events. Staffing and operational requirements will need to be considered for successful implementation.



TRAIL TYPES & MANAGEMENT



Recreational access at Bijou Basin Open Space will provide visitors with a primitive, backcountry-like experience that emphasizes opportunities for wildlife viewing, learning about local agricultural practices, and immersion in the solitude and vastness of the eastern Colorado prairie landscape. The proposed trail network includes four trail segments, totaling approximately seven miles. These smaller loops provide varied trail options as they meander through the different habitat areas found across the site.

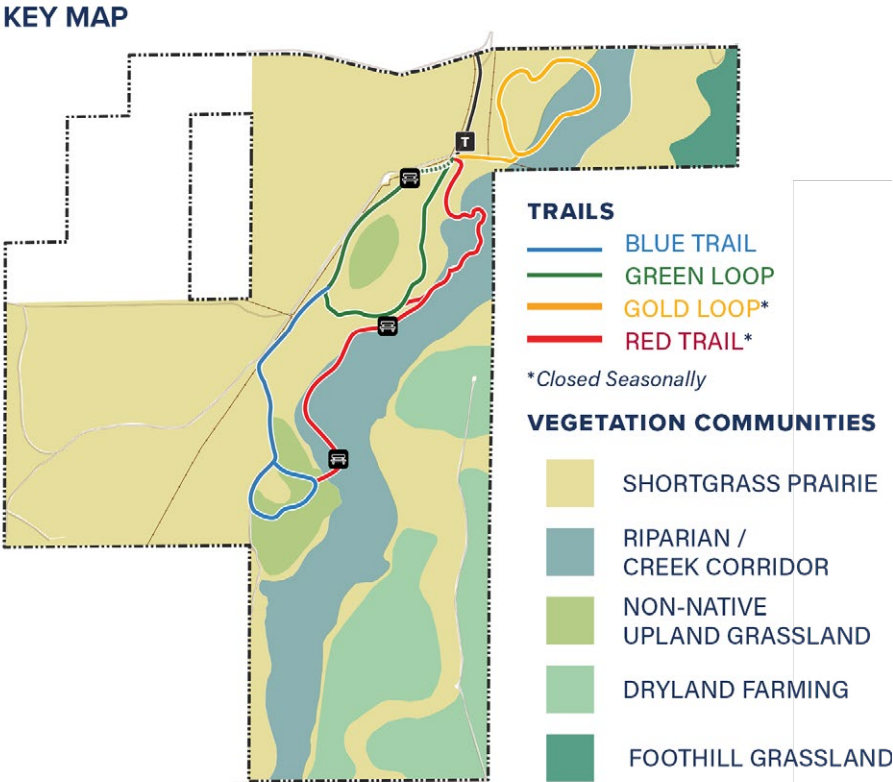
To support the goal of providing low-impact recreation on a working agricultural property, trail use should be limited to hiking and equestrian access. This recommendation aligns with the presence of existing conservation easements, which cover more than half of the original site, and is intended to minimize user conflict and reduce impacts to natural resources and wildlife habitat, particularly within the riparian corridor.

Prohibiting dogs aligns with the goals to maintain active grazing operations and protect natural resources. Dogs can present risks, from human error or lack of consideration for rules, such as injury to cattle, conflicts with wildlife, pet waste issues, and damage to flora. Due to the flat terrain and remote location, it is anticipated that Bijou Basin Open Space will not be a regional biking destination. Nearby open spaces, such as Kiowa Creek and Richmil Ranch, provide biking opportunities for local residents.

These management decisions are proposed to limit conflict on trails, protect livestock, respect the rural, working character of the property, ensure the conservation values of the property are protected, and provide visitors with a more remote nature-based experience.

Consistent with the goal of establishing low-impact recreational opportunities on site, trails are proposed to be soft-surfaced and trails within the conservation easement are proposed to be four to five feet wide to lessen habitat impacts in the riparian area. The exception is the western portion of the green trail which utilizes the existing maintenance road and will be surfaced with gravel. This section is proposed to be wider than the other natural surface trails allowing visitors to pass easily in each direction and providing an accessible route to the overlook.

Based on the existing agricultural land uses on site and the potential for flooding along West Bijou Creek, trails developed for the property are split into seasonal and year-round trail types. Proposed trails passing within the floodplain may experience temporary closures in times of high water during the spring. Proposed trails passing through Grazing Unit 2 in the northeastern corner of the property may be temporarily closed in the fall months, when calves are present, to avoid potential conflicts between visitors and cows protective of their young. Signage will be placed on site and notices posted to the open space website to alert visitors to these temporary closures.



TRAIL EXPERIENCES

Proposed trails are sited to offer recreational visitors with the opportunity to explore the various habitat types found at the Bijou Basin Open Space. Approximately 70% of trails (4.85 miles) are in the shortgrass prairie and upland areas, while 30% of trails (2.15 miles) are proposed to traverse the riparian corridor, providing a range of experiences and a chance to see different flora and fauna. While primarily focused on developing low-impact recreational trails, a number of amenities are proposed at the trailhead area and, to a lesser extent, along trails. On-trail amenities will be considered for future phasing based on use, visitorship, and staffing capacities for maintenance of the property. All amenities will be primitive in nature and intended to sit lightly on the site.

Accessible Overlook Area

Located 0.15 miles from parking and trailhead area, along a stretch of wider trail with stabilized surfacing, the overlook is intended to be a universally accessible destination offering view across the expanse of prairie landscape and down into the riparian corridor in the distance. The design of the overlook area could include a viewing platform for larger groups or benches for respite.

Shortgrass Prairie Trails

The Green Loop, Gold Loop, and Blue Trail primarily wind through the shortgrass prairie on site. These natural surface trails offer visitors the opportunity to take in long views, open skies, and seasonal colors of the grasslands. During spring and summer, the prairie comes to life with wildflowers scattered across the landscape. Look closely and you may even see native cactuses and yucca plants flowering as well. In fall, visitors can enjoy the yellow blooms of rabbitbrush sprinkled across the prairie. Special consideration should be taken to post signage and alert visitors that this open landscape also brings full exposure to the sun.

Riparian Trails

In the first round of public engagement, there was strong interest from the public to incorporate access and educational amenities along the creek corridor. In order to maintain the conservation value of the conservation easements, development must be limited within the creek corridor to soft surface trails and minimal structures. Seasonal trails are proposed to wind alongside the creek, weaving through the cottonwood galleries with rest areas located at points along the trails for wildlife viewing. Areas along proposed trails in the higher elevation, prairie landscape with good vantage points have also been identified for potential creek overlook areas. Future phasing of creek amenities may also include educational signage describing wildlife that call the riparian corridor home as well as the importance of these ephemeral streams in the prairie landscape.



PROGRAMMING

Programming Recommendations

Potential programs at Bijou Basin Open Space will be developed in future phases based on the community interests, resource availability, and protection of the site’s ecological and agricultural values. Programming should emphasize low-impact, nature-based experiences that align with the property’s ecological character and rural identity. Potential program partners may include schools, outdoor nonprofits, and local clubs. Staffing and operational needs will be evaluated to ensure the capacity to support events safely and effectively.

Potential program opportunities include:

- **Night Sky/Astronomy Events** – Leverage the area’s dark skies and remote location for stargazing and astronomy-based programs. The open space property will be closed at night, so astronomy events would be held as special events.
- **Environmental Education** – Guided nature walks, school field trips, and interpretive talks focusing on prairie ecology, riparian systems, geology, and local wildlife.
- **Recreational Events** – Small-scale events, such as trail running, designed to encourage healthy outdoor activity without compromising habitat. Parking would need to be addressed to accommodate the size of the event.

Potential Mentored Hunting

Hunting has long been part of Colorado’s eastern plains heritage. Since the County purchased the Bijou Basin property in 2010, there has been moderate public interest in allowing hunting on the property (as was permitted by the previous owner). Based on revived public interest and input received during the master planning process, the County is considering the feasibility of a limited hunting program. Due to staffing limitations, the program would need to be carried out in partnership with a non-profit partner that focuses on mentor hunting and education. Potential programming would be limited to chaperoned trips and teaching outdoor education, hunting safety and ethics over harvest success. A limited hunting program would most likely require closure of the property when hunting is occurring (likely limited to the month of December). Additional research, information-gathering, and stakeholder discussions are underway to determine feasibility and appropriate next steps. The County’s goal is to decide whether to implement a hunting program at Bijou Basin within three years of finalizing the master plan.



Night Sky/Astronomy



Environmental Education



Recreational Event / Trail Race



Mentored Hunting

AMENITIES & MATERIALS

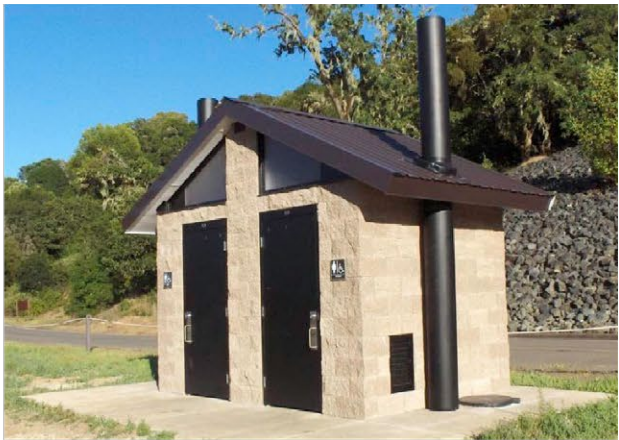
Primitive Infrastructure for Recreation

The materials and amenities for Bijou Basin Open Space should reflect the site’s rural character and ecological integrity by providing a low-impact, functional aesthetic that fits into the native prairie landscape.

Initial trailhead and on-trail amenities will focus on essential, low-maintenance infrastructure that provides user comfort and access without overbuilding the natural setting.

Key elements include:

- **A gravel parking lot at the trailhead**, incorporating horse tie posts, curb stops, and native boulders for informal edge definition and circulation.
- **A modest shade structure with picnic tables** at the trailhead amenity area to support day-use activities and provide a place for rest and orientation.
- **Future on-trail amenities such as benches or seating areas** will be strategically located for wildlife viewing, quiet reflection, and scenic overlooks.
- **Site furnishings**, including picnic tables, trash receptacles, benches, and signage will be selected from standard, catalog products that convey a natural and rustic aesthetic. These products will draw from precedent examples at similar Arapahoe County Open Spaces areas such as Richmil Ranch Open Space.
- **Wayfinding and interpretive signage** will be developed in future phases and will reflect the overall material theme, using weathered or rustic finishes, and clear, concise graphics to blend with the natural environment.



Trailhead Amenities

An amenity area located near the trailhead will include a gravel parking area, a shade structure with picnic tables, and primitive restroom facilities.



Trails & On-Trail Amenities

Trails will be low-impact, soft surface, and primarily 4 to 6 feet in width.



Signage and Wayfinding

The signage package for the trailhead and along trail wayfinding will be developed in the next phase of the project and have a natural and rustic aesthetic similar to Richmil Ranch Open Space.

OPEN SPACE ENTRANCE / TRAILHEAD

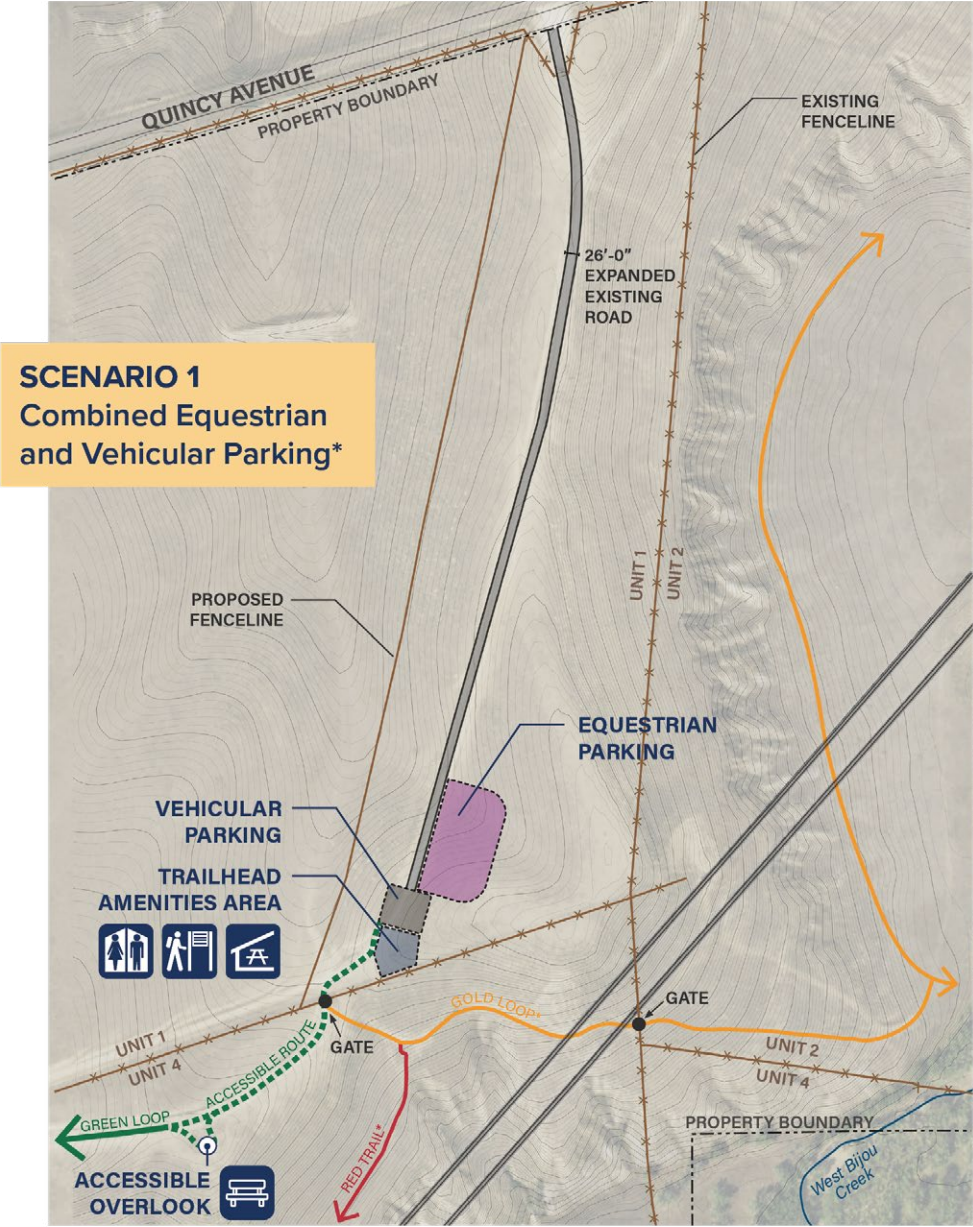
Parking Scenarios

With the proposed opening of the Bijou Basin property to equestrian users, efforts were made in the design process to mitigate potential conflicts between visitors with horse trailers and regular vehicular traffic accessing the property. Two schematic parking scenarios were developed to study the relationship between horse trailer and vehicular traffic circulation and parking. Both concepts propose low-impact gravel parking and amenity areas near the northern property entrance, strategically sited on flat terrain with favorable views across the landscape.

Scenario 1 locates both horse trailer and vehicular parking at a landing 0.40 miles into the property and offsets the horse trailer parking adjacent to the vehicular parking area. This layout locates all parking close to the trailhead amenity area and provides a consolidated footprint and potentially lighter ecological impact, while maintaining visibility from Quincy Avenue. A limitation of this scenario is the potential for overlap between regular vehicular parking and horse trailer parking during periods of high visitorship.

Scenario 2 further separates horse trailer and vehicular parking, with horse trailer parking located in a flat area to the west of an improved entrance road expanded for two-way traffic. This layout includes the development of a separate soft-surface, equestrian trail to access the trailhead. This arrangement potentially reduces site grading and provides space for future horse trailer parking expansion, while mitigating conflict between horse trailers and regular vehicular parking.

During the second round of engagement, the public was invited to voice their preference between parking concepts. Overwhelmingly public feedback was to design the park entrance and parking areas with some separation between horse trailer and regular vehicular parking for safety reasons. The final design of the parking area will be based on obtaining a more detailed topographic survey and constructibility.



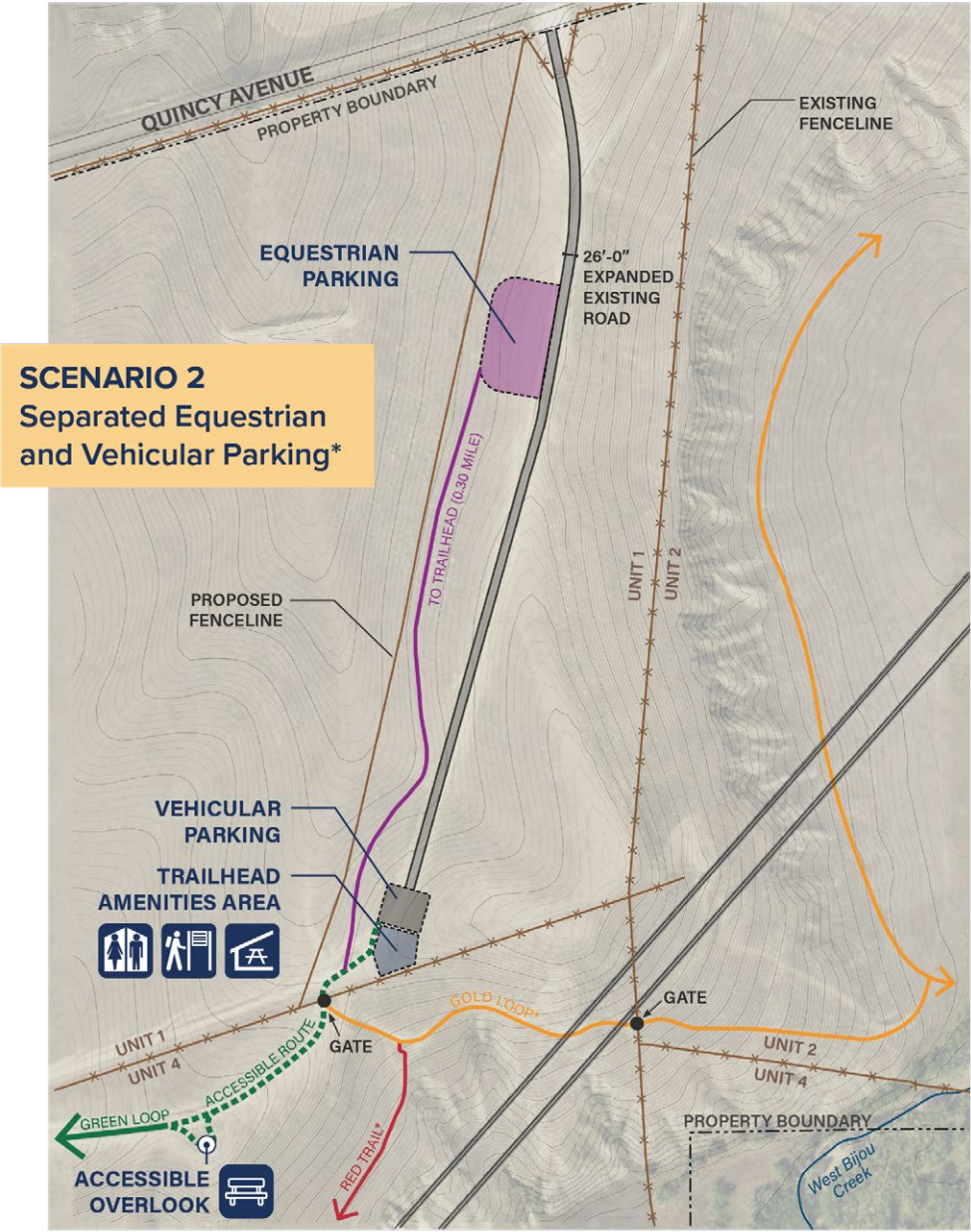
Parking Considerations - Scenario 1

- PROS**

 - Provides a consolidated footprint.
 - Offers close proximity to trailhead and amenities.
 - Location offers expansive viewshed over riparian area.
 - Provides visibility from Quincy Avenue.
- CONS**

 - There may be conflicts with standard vehicle parking, as some drivers might use spaces intended for horse trailers.

* Location of parking is dependent on detailed topographic survey and constructibility.



Parking Considerations - Scenario 2

- PROS**

 - Potential to minimize site grading.
 - Reduces the likelihood of standard vehicles occupying spaces intended for horse trailer parking.
 - Provides space for potential future horse trailer parking expansion.
 - Visible from Quincy Avenue.
- CONS**

 - Requires additional equestrian trail to access trailhead and amenities.
 - Requires additional wayfinding signage to prevent trailers from traveling too far south.

OPINION OF ESTIMATED COSTS

Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan Opinion of Probable Costs

This page includes the Opinion of Probable Costs based on the preferred plan for Bijou Basin Open Space as described in this Master Plan.

General cost assumptions were completed May 2025.

Funding for this project comes from the Open Space Sales and Use tax fund. Additionally, grant funding is being pursued to support site development and future maintenance needs.

Cost Notes/Assumptions

- 1. Does not include inflation.
- 2. Costs were developed using cost database from February 2025.

*Costs shown are rounded up to the nearest \$1000.
See Appendices for cost details.

ITEM	TOTAL COST*
TRAILS <i>Includes costs for development of soft surface trails</i>	\$780,000
AMENITIES - TRAILHEAD <i>Includes demolition, furniture, and bathroom</i>	\$505,000
AMENITIES - ON-TRAIL <i>Includes furniture, accessible overlook area, and signage allowance</i>	\$232,000
PLANTING <i>Native reseeding in disturbed areas around parking and amenity areas</i>	\$50,000
ENTRANCE ROADWAY & PARKING <i>Includes survey, demolition, expanded entrance road, and gravel parking areas</i>	\$1,330,000
SUM TOTAL	\$2,897,000
TOTAL <i>Includes 30% contingency + 20% mobilization/general condition allowance</i>	\$4,345,000



NEXT STEPS

As the project moves into the implementation phase, several key actions will be undertaken to refine and realize the vision outlined in the plan. These next steps focus on preparing the site for low-impact public access, protecting natural resources, and continuing to evaluate future needs based on visitor use.

Near-Term Priorities

- Leaseholders: Coordinate with existing and future agricultural leaseholders to ensure ongoing compatibility between public access and working land operations. The County will put a new grazing lease out to bid to start in 2027. Lease duration has yet to be determined.
- The County will develop and implement a weed management plan for noxious weeds for the property based on the findings of the agricultural and natural resource assessments to support the agricultural operations on site.
- A trash management plan for the area will need to be developed to protect natural resources, especially within the conservation easement, as public recreational access is opened on site.

Design Development

- Survey and Site Planning: Conduct a field survey for the parking and trailhead areas to determine optimal locations with minimal topographic and ecological impact.
- Trail Alignment and Ground Truthing: Perform on-the-ground validation and layout of proposed trail routes, particularly within the conservation easement, to ensure trails are appropriately sited and minimize impacts.
- On-Trail Amenities: Installation of these features may be phased in over time, guided by visitor patterns and demand.
- Educational and Interpretive Signage: Develop a comprehensive signage strategy for environmental education, wayfinding, and visitor orientation.
- Trail Naming and Identity: Establish a naming system for trails that reflects the site’s natural, cultural, and historical significance.

Future Recreation Considerations

- Potential Future Trail Expansion: Evaluate trail expansion opportunities in response to recreational user trends, local interest, and future grazing operations. In addition to property visitorship, trail expansion would depend on grazing unit usage and may be revised during the renewal of future agricultural leases. This will require further consideration and research by the County on staffing needs and operational capacity.