



Arapahoe County

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Board Summary Report

File #: 25-568

Agenda Date: 11/3/2025

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces

Prepared By:
Josh Garcia, Planner, Open Spaces

Presenter: Josh Garcia, Planner, Open Spaces Department

Subject:
1:15 PM *Bijou Basin Master Plan Adoption

Purpose and Request:

Staff will present the Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan to the Board and is requesting the BOCC to adopt the master plan.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Workforce and Community Prosperity - Support equitable access to resources for underserved communities.

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 appropriate 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 Plan. The overarching goal of the Master Plan is to strike a balance between protecting and enhancing the site's natural resources, maintaining its role as a working agricultural property, and

providing recreational opportunities for 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 twelve months of broad community outreach and concept development for this project. Community input was gathered through in-person events in Byers and Bennett, a virtual public meeting, stakeholder interviews, and online surveys, which resulted in 636 surveys being completed. To get the word out about the project, the County sent out 3,447 post cards to residents in the surrounding area to inform them about the project and upcoming events, mailed 96 letters to stakeholders including adjacent landowners, included articles in County newsletters, posted project information on social media, hung fliers and installed yard signs in the community, and the project website was visited 3700 times.

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

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 to review. The preferred master plan recommendations were developed from feedback received on the three concepts that were presented to the public during the second and third public engagement windows 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, cultural resource assessment, and the agricultural assessment,
4. Ability for County staff to maintain the property and provide visitors with a safe experience, and
5. Availability of other recreation opportunities in central Arapahoe County.

The preferred master plan recommendations include:

1. Four trail loops that provide approximately seven miles of trail that highlight the shortgrass prairie and riparian creek corridor,
2. Trails that are accessible to hikers and equestrians only (no dogs or bikes will be allowed) to minimize impacts to grazing and farming operations, protect natural resources, and reduce potential visitor conflicts,
3. Trailhead amenities such as vehicle and horse parking lots, shelter, and primitive restroom, and
4. The potential for expansion of future programming and on-trail amenities.

Alternatives: Recommend approval, approval with changes, or denial.

Fiscal Impact: The Bijou Basin Master Plan improvements are estimated to cost \$4,350,000.00. The Open Spaces Development and Acquisition fund balance exceeds the amount requested.

Alignment with Strategic Implementation Strategies: The attached framework helps Arapahoe County institutionalize values-based, transparent decision-making, documenting how we make decisions and carry out actions to achieve the county's strategic plan.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends the BOCC to adopt the Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan and approve the allocation of \$4,350,000.00 from OS Acquisition and Development Fund for the construction of the Bijou Basin Open Space site improvements.

Concurrence: The Open Spaces Trails and Advisory Board recommended to the BOCC the adoption of the Bijou Basin Open Space Master Plan and approve the allocation of \$4,350,000.00 from OS Acquisition and Development Fund for the construction of the Bijou Basin Open Space site improvements at their meeting on October 27, 2025.