Arapahoe County

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ARAPAHOE COUNTY

Board Summary Report

File #: 25-630 **Agenda Date:** 11/17/2025 **Agenda #:**

To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingenot, Director, Open Spaces Department

Prepared By:
Josh Garcia, Planner, Open Spaces Department; Dan Payson, Open Spaces Parks and Trails Manager; Gunnar Zollinger, Operations Supervisor, Open Spaces Department; Sam Bahl, Natural Resources & Agricultural Specialist, Open Spaces Department

Presenter: Josh Garcia, Planner, Open Spaces Department; Gunnar Zollinger, Operations Supervisor, Open Spaces Department; Sam Bahl, Natural Resources & Agricultural Specialist, Open Spaces Department

Subject:
1:15 PM *Colorado Parks and Wildlife Oil and Gas Compensatory Mitigation Grant Funding for Arapahoe County Open Spaces Shortgrass Prairie Restoration

Purpose and Request:
Staff will present this funding opportunity through Colorado Parks and Wildlife and request approval to submit a project proposal for grant funding and if awarded, expend the funds.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Sustainable Growth and Infrastructure - Support environmentally responsible development and energy efficiency in county operations.

Background and Discussion: Funding for the Oil and Gas Compensatory Mitigation Grant program comes from impact fees that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) collects from oil and gas operators whose projects impact high-priority habitats. In 2020 the Colorado Energy and Carbon Management Commission (ECMC) established new oil and gas regulations to meet the requirements of Senate Bill 19-181. These regulations include “mandatory compensatory mitigation” for new oil and gas developments occurring within CPW identified high priority habitats (HPH). Oil and gas projects may elect to pay a fee to CPW to meet their compensatory mitigation obligations when permitting new oil and gas projects. CPW can then utilize these funds to implement wildlife habitat conservation and restoration projects to offset the adverse impacts associated with oil and gas development activities.

In early September 2025, staff from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Northeast Region and Arapahoe County met to discuss the Oil and Gas Compensatory Mitigation Grant program and see if the County had any projects that might would be a good fit for the program. During this meeting, CPW staff informed County staff that the amount of funding was based on where the oil and gas impacts took place and in general, CPW staff prefer to have mitigation projects occur in or near the county where the impact occurred. CPW staff has stated that up to $390,000 in mitigation fees are currently available for the grant program in the Arapahoe County, southern Adams County and northern Elbert County areas. Most of these fees have been generated from projects in Arapahoe County.

After this initial meeting, Open Spaces staff met internally to brainstorm potential wildlife habitat conservation and restoration projects and then had a follow up meeting with CPW staff in early October 2025. Staff reviewed and discussed shortgrass prairie restoration projects at Kiowa Creek South, Bijou Basin, Richmil Ranch and the Kiowa Creek Annex properties in eastern Arapahoe County with CPW staff. Each of these properties are within CPW-mapped high priority habitat for Mule Deer, and most are in CPW-mapped high priority habitat for Pronghorn. CPW agreed the projects would be a good fit for the grant program and recommended County staff submit a brief proposal for CPW's regional staff to review. CPW staff also informed the County that it generally takes three to six months to approve and fund restoration projects.

Based on staff capacity and the amount of funding currently available, staff have elected to submit a proposal for shortgrass prairie restoration projects at the Richmil Ranch Open Space and Kiowa Creek Annex properties. These restoration projects are important because they will help Open Spaces achieve our Master Plan Objective 2: Maintain Ecosystem Health and Resilience; Priority Restore and Conserve Wildlife Habitat (page117) by restoring shortgrass prairie and improving wildlife habitat for Mule Deer, Pronghorn, as well as many other wildlife species that utilize this habitat. A secondary benefit to this restoration work is the opportunity to treat several noxious weeds and other highly invasive weed species on county owned properties which helps the Department comply with state law and achieve our goal of being good, responsible neighbors to surrounding agricultural operations.

These restoration projects will restore 115-acres of shortgrass prairie in total. Contractors will be hired to perform weed treatments from 2026 - 2028 and a seeding contractor will be hired to reseed the areas in 2027 and 2028 by use of a drill seeder. The County will use a shortgrass prairie seed mix tailored toward Mule Deer and Pronghorn habitat. Staff are currently working on a grant proposal to submit to CPW and expect to be able to submit the proposal by the end of November 2025. The budget is still being finalized but could be up to the $390,000 available.

Alternatives: Recommend approval, approval with changes, or denial. If denied, the County would be passing on state funding for restoration of Open Spaces Department managed properties.

Fiscal Impact: There are no fiscal impacts associated with the grant other than allocating staff time to develop the grant proposal and if awarded, manage the restoration projects. No county financial match or commitment is required to secure the CPW funds. If the grant is awarded, the funds will be transferred to the County upon award of the grant.

Alignment with Strategic Implementation Strategies: N/A

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommend the BOCC approve the Open Spaces Department's submittal of the grant application and if awarded, expend the grants funds on shortgrass prairie restoration at the Richmill Ranch and Kiowa Creek Annex open space properties.

Concurrence: N/A

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