



# Arapahoe County

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## Board Summary Report

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**File #:** 21-098

**Agenda Date:** 1/26/2021

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**To:** Board of County Commissioners

**Through:** Shannon Carter, Director, Open Spaces

**Prepared By:**

Glen Poole, Open Spaces Operations Manager

Brett Collins, Acquisitions and Grants Manager

Tim Aston, CSU Extension Director

**Presenter:** Glen Poole, Open Spaces Operations Manager, Brett Collins, Acquisitions and Grants Manager, and Tim Aston, CSU Extension Director

**Subject:**

2:30 PM \*Update on Eastern Open Spaces and Integration of CSU Extension into the Open Spaces Department

**Purpose and Request:**

Open Spaces staff will present information to update the Board on the status of properties in the eastern portion of the County, review of site operations, site development efforts, and the integration of the CSU Extension into the Open Spaces Department.

This item is to inform the Board about the status of operations, programming, and development efforts on County owned properties east of E-470 and to present a brief overview of the CSU Extension integration into the Open Spaces Department. Various staff will be available to answer questions the Board may have on these properties and their connection to CSU Extension programming.

**Background and Discussion:** The Open Spaces Program began in 2003 when County voters approved a .25% Sales and Use Tax based on a resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, which defined the purpose, funding allocations and service provisions of the Program. Utilizing the Acquisition and Development funds of the sales tax revenue, the Open Spaces Department has acquired several open space properties through fee simple purchases or conservation easements in the eastern portion of the County since the inception of the

program. Properties acquired have met one or more of the purposes of the tax which are to: preserve urban and rural open space and natural areas; protect lands that preserve water quality in rivers, lakes and streams; provide, maintain and improve neighborhood parks, open space, sports fields, picnic facilities, and biking, walking and multi-use trails; protect wildlife habitat and corridors; protect views, vistas and ridgelines; preserve agricultural and ranch lands; and enhance and maintain designated heritage areas.

The intent when acquiring the properties, was to allow for controlled public access that best suits the conservation values inherent to each property by creating a site-specific master plan and developing site-specific operations and programming. Several of the properties have been developed, one is in the planning stages, others are scheduled for plan development.

This year a strategic decision was made to integrate the CSU Extension Program into the Open Spaces Department. The integration of the CSU Extension Program and associated staff team will bring significant value to the Open Space Department. The outreach, educational, research and programming expertise of the CSU Extension and their connection to the Colorado State University system will greatly improve the Open Spaces Department's ability to steward land resources, provide public programming and resource based services to the citizens of the County.

The attached Open Spaces, Parks, and Regional Trail map shows the current properties under County management or conservation easement within Arapahoe County. Staff will provide an overview to the Board on the status the open space properties east of the E-470. The properties are:

#### **Properties Owned by Arapahoe County:**

Arapahoe County Fairgrounds and Regional Park (264 acres)

Kiowa Creek South Open Space (492 acres)

Kiowa Creek North Open Space (265 acres)

Bijou Basin Open Space (2,820 acres)

Mule Gulch Open Space (940 acres)

Richmil Ranch Open Space (352 acres)

#### **Conservation Easements on the Eastern Plains:**

Coal and Senac Creek (316 acres)

Bennett Regional Park and Open Space (193 acres)

Home Ranch (500 acres)

West Bijou-L&L Hasenbalg (931 acres)

West Bijou-R&A Hasenbalg (437 acres)

Bijou Canyons (128 acres)

Last Partners (1,000 acres)

Plains Conservation Center (2,688 acres)

Mule Gulch (950 acres)

All the properties owned by the County are managed and maintained by the Open Spaces Operations and Maintenance team. The conservation easements are on properties in private ownership and are monitored annually by the Grants and Acquisitions staff for compliance with the terms of the Conservation Easement Agreements. The Conservation Easements limit public access but provide for the conservation and protection of the land from future development while supporting local agriculture, wildlife habitat and other conservation values.

Arapahoe County has six open space parks east of E-470 with numerous amenities, varying levels of public use and agricultural practices. Below is a brief description for each property:

Arapahoe County Fairgrounds Park: Includes a loop trail system, a shade pavilion, natural play areas and a passive-use central green lawn. During 2019 the Fairgrounds Event Center had over 85,800 visitors to events and activities hosted at the facility. The site is fully open to the public for drop in and rental use. Neighbors the City of Aurora Reservoir.

Kiowa Creek South: Includes an aging barn, horse corrals, sorting pens, several grazing units, a wheat field, and a riparian area with an intermittent creek. Site is leased by a local rancher, generating an average of \$3,000 dollars in annual revenue to the Department.

Kiowa Creek North: Includes several grazing units, historic terraced agricultural fields, oil/gas lease pad site mitigation, potential Town of Bennet trail underpass and a riparian area with intermittent creek. Site is leased by a local rancher generating an average of \$2,800 dollars in annual revenue to the Department. The property is currently in the Master Plan phase of initial development.

Bijou Basin Open Space: Includes expansive sections of short grass prairie, unique geological rock outcroppings, a wide riparian area, numerous grazing units with associate agricultural infrastructure, two dryland farming fields and several established ranch roads. Site is leased by a local rancher and farmer, generating between \$10,000 to \$18,000 dollars in annual revenue to the Department. The property is available

for permitted public use and is adjacent to other conserved lands.

Mule Gulch: Includes several sections of dryland wheat fields under annual production by a local lessee, a riparian area with an intermittent creek and is adjacent to other conserved lands. The local farmer shares crop production profits with the County, generating between \$8,000 to \$14,000 dollars in annual revenue to the Department depending on crop production and market values.

Richmil Ranch Open Space: Includes a two irrigated farming fields, a loop trail system, accessible parking, picnic pavilion, and a restroom. Over the past several years staff have conducted trail use counts and logged 6,000 visitors. Future expansion of the parking lot will add additional equestrian parking and accommodate numerous trailers. Site is leased by a local rancher, generating an average of \$1,000 dollars in annual revenue to the Department.

Open Spaces Planning staff are working on planning projects on the eastern plains of the County. Planning staff along with a consultant are currently engaged in developing a master plan for the Kiowa Creek North Open Space. The site master plan will lead to the initial development of Kiowa North with a construction project in 2022. Anticipated amenities include a loop trail system with access under Kiowa-Bennett Road, picnic pavilion, parking, and other desires identified by the public master plan process. During the initial due diligence and survey work for the Kiowa Creek North development project two large drilling pads were discovered that encumber the middle of the property. These drilling pads were left over from a previous residential development plan. Staff is working on getting the pads relocated or extinguished so they don't interfere with the site master plan designs and amenity installation. Funding for the site master planning and development of Bijou Basin is programmed to potentially begin in early 2023. Both development projects would support various types of public access and programming on these properties. Kiowa Creek South and Mule Gulch Open Spaces are focused on agricultural production and are remote from the I-70 corridor and associated municipalities/towns. These properties will be master planned in the future.

This Study Session was to provide information to the Board on the eastern plains' properties and the value of the integration of CSU Extension into the Open Spaces Department. Staff from Open Spaces and CSU Extension will seek guidance/approval in the future for new programs as new operational and educational strategies are developed. For example, the current Open Space Department Master Plan process has identified citizen interest in hunting opportunities on County open spaces. In addition to supporting a potentially new hunting program, there are opportunities to for Open Space staff to partner with the CSU Extension on educational and outreach programming. The Open Space Department added 10 staff members. CSU staff will be identifying opportunities for cross programming within their 4H Club, Master Gardner Program, and pollinators initiative. A Community Needs Assessment is being conducted by Arapahoe County CSU Extension and the State of Colorado which will inform CSU staff on programs desired by the community within Arapahoe County. The Community Needs Assessment will play a central role in defining Extension programming as they integrate into the Open Spaces Department and seek to continue their service to the citizens of Arapahoe County.

**Fiscal Impact:** The Open Spaces Department operates and maintains its eastern properties with Open Spaces Sales and Use Tax funds and by allocating lease revenue back to individual properties. The CSU Extension Program is supported by the County's General Fund and funds from the State of Colorado.

**Alternatives:** None.

**Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

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

**Staff Recommendation:** In this section provide the staff recommendation, if any, associated with the topic of the study session.

**Concurrence:** In this section you should state whether there are any others that concur with the staff recommendation.