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**ecological
health**





INTRODUCTION

More than 100,000 acres of open space have been protected by Boulder County to preserve natural, cultural, and agricultural resources and provide public uses that reflect sound resource management and community values. Other government and private entities manage an additional 109,600 acres of federal land and 53,600 acres of open space and public land within Boulder County municipalities. Preserving and restoring natural resources is a priority for the community and benefits wildlife and the environment.

Boulder County preserves land in two ways: through outright acquisition or with conservation easements. Either purchase method ensures the land will remain an ecologically viable habitat for wildlife and plants, and remain free from urban development. In addition to purchasing open space, Boulder County started restoring grasslands on unproductive agricultural

land more than 20 years ago and continues to expand these efforts.

Boulder County also involves private property owners in helping preserve ecological health through its land-use regulatory process. Zoning regulations limit the intensity of development in the county and development must be designed with environmental impacts in mind. Land-use regulations also

provide opportunities for property owners to permanently remove development rights from their land, or limit the size of future development that can occur on the land.

Along with preserving land, Boulder County and our municipal partners enhance stream or riparian habitats. Most wildlife use our stream corridor habitats during their lives, and healthy riparian areas also protect water quality. In addition, fire suppression, overgrazing, and climate change have all impacted the health of forests in Boulder County. Reintroducing disturbances, like thinning trees or prescribed fire, help improve forest health. Finally, trails give people opportunities to improve their health and well-being, enjoy the outdoors, and connect with the natural world. Boulder County takes pride in maintaining more than 120 miles of trails, thereby bringing our community outdoors to appreciate Colorado landscapes. So far, we have restored more than six miles of stream corridor with revegetation and natural stream design.



ecological goal

Ensure healthy and vibrant ecosystems that sustain all naturally occurring species, along with our human population.



COUNTY OPERATION STRATEGIES

Preserve open space and restore grasslands, wetlands, and forests

- Restore 600 additional acres of forest land by 2020 with forest thinning or prescribed fire.
 - Enhance agricultural lands by implementing soil conservation plans and installing pollinator plots.
 - Identify additional grassland and open space areas to restore by 2025.
 - Preserve 5,000 acres of suitable prairie dog habitat on county open space.
 - Reintroduce black-footed ferrets onto county open space by 2020.
 - Preserve an additional 2,500 acres of open space and associated water rights by the end of 2020.
 - Continue restoration of 1,800 acres of converted grasslands and restore three additional degraded agricultural areas by 2020.
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Restore riparian habitat on Boulder County properties

- Improve native fish habitat by collaboratively installing fish passage on diversion structures along the St. Vrain River.
 - Restore five miles of riparian habitat on Boulder, St. Vrain, Lefthand, and Geer Creeks by 2020.
 - Maintain healthy in-stream flows as part of riparian restoration efforts.
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**COUNTY OPERATION STRATEGIES**

Identify opportunities to enhance policies related to ecological health in the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP), and continue to develop implementation measures for policies already in place

- Provide education opportunities for planners and practitioners in other county departments, decision makers, and the public about the ecological health-related policies (i.e., Environmental Resources Element, Sustainability Element, Natural Hazards Element) that currently exist in the BCCP, so that they can be more fully utilized.
- Bolster policies related to forest health that currently exist in both the Sustainability Element and the Natural Hazards Element of the BCCP.





COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

Increase the number of acres of healthy forests in Boulder County

- Provide private landowners a means to dispose of their wood in an environmentally sustainable manner at the Community Forestry Sort Yards.
 - Improve and expand rural slash and debris removal programs for forest health, wildfire mitigation, and emerald ash borer management by establishing a sort yard in the plains.
 - Create and expand the use of community forestry sort yards, chipping grants, and other tools.
 - Expand utilization of material collected in sort yards and look for opportunities for collaboration with communities within the county where there is high demand for these materials.
 - Plan and implement landscape-scale forest treatments in the northern section of the county at Hall Ranch, Heil Valley Ranch, and on adjacent public lands, in collaboration with the USFS and City of Longmont.
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Increase the percentage of mountain residents who have performed effective fire mitigation

- Provide comprehensive, on-site, wildfire mitigation assessments to homeowners through Wildfire Partners.
 - Offer phone-advising services to help ensure mitigation is completed and maintained.
 - Recognize and keep track of residents who have performed effective mitigation with yard signs, Wildfire Partners Certificates, reinspections, and annual stickers.
 - Advocate for more state funding for wildfire mitigation programs and incentives.
 - Work collaboratively with public and private sector partners to increase participation rates and levels of mitigation.
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**COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

Ensure urban development is concentrated within, or adjacent to, existing urban areas to preserve environmental resources and the rural character of the county

- Renew, extend, and maintain intergovernmental agreements with municipalities to cooperatively plan for areas of development and areas for preservation.
 - Limit and manage development in the forested areas of Boulder County to protect those lands and resources from fragmentation and other associated impacts.
 - Implement education programs for decision makers, the public, and staff about policies encouraging compact development patterns.
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Maintain existing trails and add additional miles of trails

- Maintain all existing Boulder County trails.
 - Complete repairs to and reopen the Anne U. White Trail by 2018.
 - Complete three miles of trail construction at Heil Valley Ranch by 2018.
 - Construct the six- to seven-mile trail at Tolland Ranch by 2024.
 - Add more trails where appropriate and desired for recreation and connectivity while preserving wildlife and other natural resources.
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By utilizing National Community Planning month, Boulder County highlights the benefits and issues surrounding planning for preservation and development in the county. Potential tools to help spread the message include a speakers series, bike tours, and website information. In the past, the county has collaborated on these efforts by offering educational bike tours in conjunction with the cities of Boulder, Lafayette, and Louisville and the town of Superior, and by offering a presentation to the public on the history of planning in the county, as well as cross-departmental presentations on current planning efforts.



QUALITY OF LIFE

Open space protects habitat for naturally occurring ecosystems and their native wildlife populations. Open space also contributes to our community values by conserving natural, cultural, and agricultural resources, and by supporting a strong economy. Open space can help our economy by increasing property values near open space, improving regional economic performance by attracting quality workers for area businesses, increasing space for bike paths and other active

transportation options between cities, and infusing local and tourist dollars into outdoor recreation activities (more than \$28 billion annual impact to Colorado's economy). A significant part of the economic engine of Boulder County can be attributed to the value of working, living, and playing in the same area. Boulder County Open Space contributes to this high quality of life and creates a community that values preserving and utilizing open space.



WILDFIRE PARTNERS

Wildfire Partners is Boulder County's program to help homeowners prepare for wildfires and create resilient communities. Western wildfires have increased in number and size over the last three decades. With increased warming due to climate change, we are projected to experience substantially higher risk of climate-driven fires in the future. Launched in 2014, Wildfire Partners is

Boulder County's unique, award-winning approach to addressing increasing wildfire risk. Modeled after EnergySmart, Wildfire Partners¹² doesn't just educate homeowners—it empowers them. More than 35 organizations, including insurance companies and realtors, have joined forces to help homeowners and communities take responsibility for the future.

PHOTO BY J MCMAHUS



POLICY PRIORITIES

The following are environmental sustainability policy priorities adopted through Boulder County's legislative agenda:

POLICY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Conserve and protect Colorado's land and natural resources

Colorado's environment defines its quality of life and economy. Recognizing this, state and local government partners have developed an array of public policy and programmatic initiatives designed to preserve and protect Colorado's land and natural resources. Examples include the Conservation Easement Tax Credit

and Great Outdoors Colorado. Boulder County will continue to utilize these tools to protect our local environment and will advocate for their continuation and expansion, to ensure the preservation of the environment and quality of life that Coloradans have grown to expect.





POLICY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Promote wildfire mitigation in communities at risk for wildfire

Wildfires in Boulder County and across the state have reinforced the need for collaborative landowner and intergovernmental participation in mitigation efforts in the wildland-urban interface. In particular, Boulder County supports legislation to improve forest health, reduce fuels for fire, and create fuel breaks and safe escape routes. It also supports increasing homeowner participation in the creation and maintenance of defensible space and safe home ignition

zones, as well as increasing use of ignition-resistant building materials in residential construction. Boulder County further advocates intergovernmental coordination before, during, and after a wildfire to reduce the risk of wildfire and ensure public safety and effective management during a wildfire. Finally, the county supports limiting and managing development in the forested areas of Boulder County to protect those lands and resources from fragmentation and other associated impacts.

Oppose legislation to transfer Colorado’s federal public lands to state ownership

Boulder County supports the protection of Colorado’s federal public lands, including national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, historic sites, and wilderness areas, and will oppose legislation that attempts to authorize state control of these lands. Research consistently shows that public lands serve as economic drivers for local communities by increasing tourism, income and employment opportunities, and land and home values. According to

the State, Colorado’s outdoor recreation economy alone contributes \$28 billion annually to Colorado’s economy,¹³ supports more than 220,000 jobs across Colorado, and generates \$2 billion in annual state and local tax revenue. The transfer of these lands to state control raises legitimate concerns that the land will be sold to private interests, or the natural resources will be exploited to pay for firefighting and other management costs.



POLICY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Promote broad access to public lands to develop a strong stewardship and conservation ethic

Colorado’s natural environment depends upon the next generation of residents and visitors to sustain and promote the health of local, state, and federal public lands. Boulder County supports efforts that foster stewardship and long-term support for our public lands, such as youth corps

programs; programs to get children, seniors, and multicultural populations outdoors; and efforts to link urban areas to parks and open spaces. Boulder County supports initiatives aimed at establishing an appreciation for our public lands among all of the diverse populations of Coloradans.

Establish and complete regional trail systems that link communities

In 2015, the governor initiated an effort through the Department of Natural Resources to work in conjunction with Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, the Colorado Department of Transportation, local governments, nonprofits, and foundations to identify obstacles, including funding, ownership, access, and others, to the completion of regional trails throughout Colorado.

In Boulder County, regional trails link communities to local and federal public lands, thereby providing access to outdoor amenities and outdoor recreation. Boulder County supports statewide efforts to assist with the completion of regional trail systems that have been identified and supported by communities through local planning processes.



Planning Boulder County's Growth

A group of citizen activists in the 1970s can be credited with the foresight to plan for our future. They realized that unplanned growth could forever alter the natural ecological environment, thus changing the landscape of Boulder County. This realization was the impetus for comprehensive land-use planning. The original Boulder County Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1978, set the stage for shaping our landscape today by defining where desirable growth could occur and launching an open space protection program. The county has followed this plan by creating agreements with municipalities to outline community boundaries,

purchasing open space, and directing land uses to appropriate areas.

Today, in Boulder County, you can see preserved range lands and working farms; protected forest, riparian, and grassland ecosystems that host myriad wildlife; multiple-use trails; and urban buffers. Urban development is adjacent to urban areas, while rural areas remain vibrant. Rare or endangered animals, like the burrowing owl, have places to nest. Soaring eagles are more plentiful in our skies. Forests protect our water sources, and lands that were once degraded are now home to native plants and animals.

**In total, the county
has preserved more than
100,000 acres of land.**





TAKE ACTION

Open Space

Boulder County has a variety of volunteer opportunities for anyone interested in caring for open space. During the past five years, community members have doubled their volunteer hours, and Boulder County Parks & Open Space¹⁴ has expanded opportunities for you to have a hand in preserving the open space. Join us, and help define the future for the next generation!

- ☐ Collect native seeds
- ☐ Adopt a trail to clean up regularly
- ☐ Help restore forests
- ☐ Monitor wildlife or weeds
- ☐ Volunteer your organization as a partner and help on various projects





RESOURCES

More Information

**Boulder County
Comprehensive Plan**

[bouldercounty.org/
property-and-land/
land-use/planning/
boulder-county-
comprehensive-plan](https://bouldercounty.org/property-and-land/land-use/planning/boulder-county-comprehensive-plan)

**12 Wildfire Mitigation for
Mountain Homes**

WildfirePartners.org

**13 Colorado's Outdoor
Recreation Economy**

[choosecolorado.com/
key-industries/
outdoor-recreation](https://choosecolorado.com/key-industries/outdoor-recreation)

14 Get Outside! Volunteer!

[BoulderCountyOpen
Space.org](https://BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org)

