

Introduction

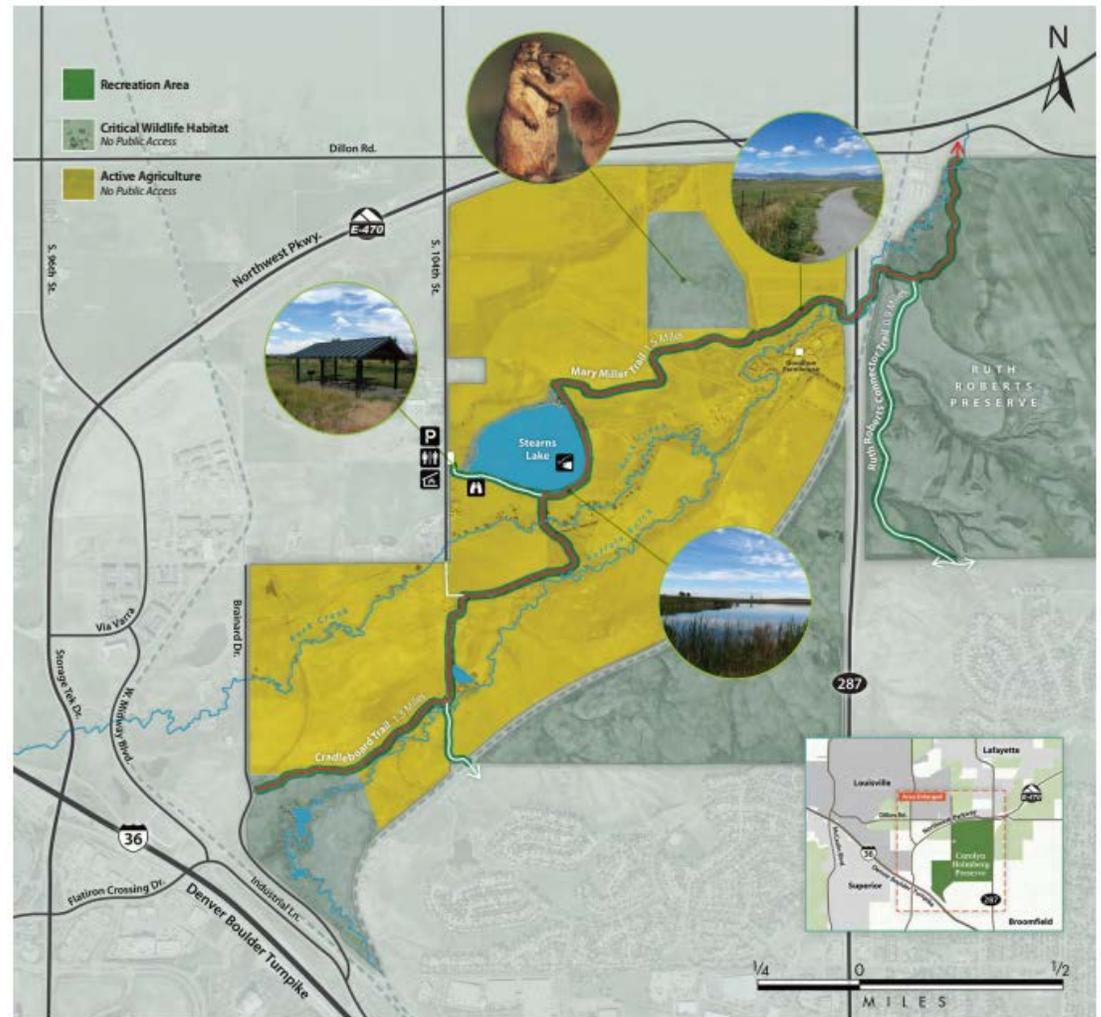
Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm is a multi-faceted open space property that encompasses a wide variety of resource activities. Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BCPOS) is considering refinements to the management plan to better balance the multiple uses of this property. We are in the initial planning phase and would like your input.

Planning Area and location

- ▶ Total of 1,124 acres
- ▶ Located in southeast Boulder County, west of state Highway 287 and south of Dillon Rd.
- ▶ Borders the City and County of Broomfield to the south and City of Lafayette to the northwest

Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm

LEGEND		LOCATION	
Restrooms	Fishing	Multi-use Trail (pedestrian, equestrian, bikes)	Located north of Broomfield at the junction of South 104th St and Dillon Road
Trailhead Parking	Wildlife Viewing	Paved Road	
Picnic Shelter		Rock Creek Regional Trail	
		Railroad	



Background

Key Property Features

- ▶ Purchased to preserve the open space buffer zone and agricultural lands
- ▶ Birds of Prey Foundation rehabilitation center
- ▶ 3.3 miles public trail system
- ▶ Visited by over 75,000 recreationalists in 2019 (not including U-Pick-Em pumpkin patch)
- ▶ Designated cultural landscape
- ▶ Critical Wildlife Habitat areas
- ▶ Riparian creek corridors, wetlands, and significant natural communities
- ▶ Oil and gas wells



Overview of Issues, Opportunities and Constraints

- ▶ While management of the property is generally working well, there are several resource management issues and conflicts that need to be addressed.
- ▶ BCPOS has assembled an internal multi-disciplinary project team to discuss the intersections between resource values and to identify topic areas to focus on in the update.
- ▶ The project team has developed a draft framework to guide potential refinement to reduce conflicts between resources.
- ▶ The team seeks public input on this approach and welcomes comments on issues that should be included for review in the 2020 update.



2020 Management Plan Update



Proposed Plan Goals

Preserve & Enhance

- ▶ Critical wildlife habitats
- ▶ Unique stands of shortgrass prairie
- ▶ Wetlands and riparian areas
- ▶ Historic/archaeological resources

Maintain

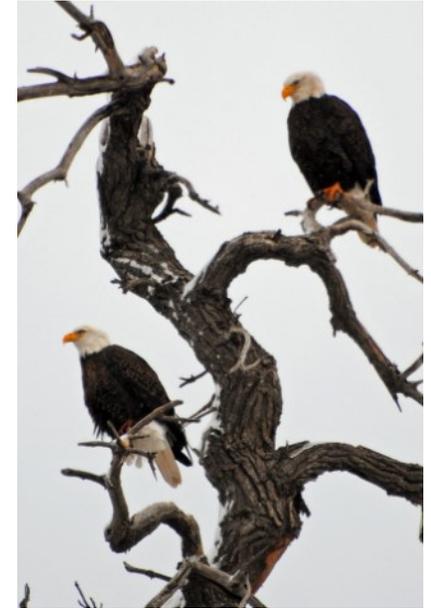
- ▶ Agricultural production and associated water rights

Provide

- ▶ Compatible recreational use

Proposed Plan Objectives

- ▶ Guide management of open space resources
- ▶ Identify opportunities for enhancement
- ▶ Provide for sustainable use and stewardship
- ▶ Incorporate input from public stakeholders
- ▶ Review the most up-to-date information
- ▶ Ensure plan is fiscally sound





Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm Proposed Vision

Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm is a working landscape of farming, ranching, irrigation features, and reservoirs, intertwined with critical wildlife, wetland, riparian, and grassland habitats, that preserves its distinct history and provides regional trail connectivity and recreational amenities for current and future generations.

Topic: Farm Operations

Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm is comprised of over 400 acres of irrigated cropland and 490 acres of rangeland. Crops include small grains, pumpkins, and specialty fall gourds/Indian corn, alfalfa, and grass for hay and pasture. A highlight is the fall U-Pick-Em pumpkin patch and corn maze.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Suitability of farm headquarters site and historic buildings for modern farm operations
- ▶ Interaction between farm operations, trails, natural resources, and riparian areas
- ▶ Effectiveness of current fencing in keeping livestock contained
- ▶ Seasonal wildlife closures impact farm operations
- ▶ Some MOA designated land is being farmed as dry cropland

Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Potential change in land designation of 40-acre prairie dog preserve to cropland
- ▶ Consider improved shop, equipment storage, and livestock handling facilities
- ▶ Potential to improve irrigation facilities
- ▶ Refine fencing and gates to improve livestock grazing management

Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Historic buildings, cultural, and paleontological resources
- ▶ Existing trails, including the Rock Creek Regional trail
- ▶ Existing prairie dog colonies
- ▶ Critical wildlife, riparian, and wetland habitat areas

Topic: Water

Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm has a diverse set of water rights including on-farm storage and several miles of riparian corridors. Two fully operational reservoirs provide water to irrigate agriculture and support ongoing farm operations. One of these, Stearns Lake, also serves the needs of multiple resources including a dedicated wildlife habitat preserve, recreational fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Adequate water rights to store water in existing ponds at Buffalo Gulch
- ▶ Significant Sedimentation in Buffalo Gulch ponds
- ▶ Aging Stearns Lake dam
- ▶ Water use recording infrastructure is insufficient and accuracy is variable
- ▶ Inefficient water conveyance and irrigation infrastructure
- ▶ Concern for water quality due to storm water flows and grazing practices

Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Potential Stearns Lake increased storage, dam spillway, and structural improvements
- ▶ Potential to increase efficiency of water delivery and yield of water rights
- ▶ Potential modification of diversion structures in Rock Creek and Buffalo Gulch
- ▶ Research off-stream livestock watering opportunities
- ▶ Potential to improve oversight of diversion structures/water conveyance in creeks

Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Water laws and restrictions on types of use of existing water rights
- ▶ Difficulty developing wells without major inputs and modifications
- ▶ Potential loss of habitat due to increased efficiency of conveyance and irrigation

Topic: Visitor Access and Accessibility

Renowned for wildlife-watching, the open space offers year-round opportunities for visitors to enjoy. The fairly flat terrain makes it a great place for families with young children to explore. Park visitors hike and ride trails, fish at Stearns Lake, and watch the seasonal changes of the working farm. The Goodhue Farmhouse provides a meeting place for local governmental agencies and nonprofits that partner with Boulder County government.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Seasonal wildlife closures of the regional trail
- ▶ Detours do not meet multi-use trail standards
- ▶ Demand for improved access and parking from Brainard Rd.
- ▶ Capacity of parking and lack of equestrian parking at Stearns Lake trailhead
- ▶ Difficulty for visitors to distinguish trail corridor from farm access roads
- ▶ Capacity of infrastructure to handle growing pumpkin patch visitation
- ▶ Trail erosion and damage due to standing water at select locations
- ▶ There is no access to Mary Miller trail for groups using the Goodhue Farmhouse.

Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Potential to relocate portions of the regional trail or build new trails
- ▶ Formalize new trailhead(s) from Brainard Rd.
- ▶ Modify trail surface to address erosion and standing water
- ▶ Improve wayfinding and informational signage
- ▶ Explore watchable wildlife opportunities for the public
- ▶ Improve ADA access to public buildings, Stearns Lake, and trails
- ▶ Improve fishing infrastructure at Stearns Lake
- ▶ New 104th Street connector trail from Stearn's Lake to Coal Creek regional Trail
- ▶ Coordinate with Broomfield on a connection to U.S. 36 bikeway/RTD Park-n-Ride.

Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Need to balance recreational opportunities with protection of sensitive and important natural and cultural resources (leopard frogs, raptors, critical wildlife, prehistoric, historic sites)
- ▶ Unknown/changing location(s) of seasonal closures for nesting birds
- ▶ Existing agricultural operations, including irrigation infrastructure
- ▶ Rock Creek regulatory floodplain risk
- ▶ Additional cost for new infrastructure construction and on-going maintenance

Topic: Historic Buildings, Cultural, and Paleontological Resources

There are 25 known cultural resource sites on the property. These include seven prehistoric sites (three open camps and four isolated finds) and 18 sites including Rock Creek Farm/Stearns Dairy, Dwight Nelson Farm, Goodhue Ditch segments, Burlington Northern Railroad segments, Sunnyside coal mine, and several isolated finds. Additionally, three dinosaur fossil fragments were collected on property.

Areas of Concern

- ▶ Stewardship of historic buildings
- ▶ Backlog of historic building maintenance projects
- ▶ Age and completeness of cultural resource data
- ▶ Extent and significance of paleontological resources is unknown
- ▶ Goat Hill archaeology site extent and significance is unknown
- ▶ Rock Creek stage stop station location is unknown
- ▶ Lack of resource monitoring
- ▶ Presence of non-operational equipment and debris near farm buildings affects aesthetics

Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Raise awareness of historic resource values and increase stewardship
- ▶ Amend a historic building maintenance schedule
- ▶ Complete cultural resource survey and paleontology resource assessment for entire property
- ▶ Establish an adaptive management approach
- ▶ Complete archaeology assessments for the Rock Creek stage station and Goat Hill sites
- ▶ Nominate entire property to National Register of Historic Places

Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Cultural and paleontological resource survey incomplete
- ▶ To date, only 39% of the property (385 acres) surveyed



Triceratops frill fragment



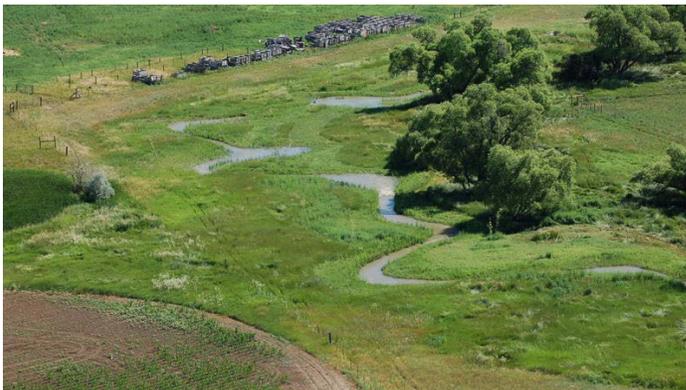
Hadrosaur vertebrae



Topic: Wildlife, Riparian and Wetland Habitat Areas

Bird species diversity is high. Many raptor species use the property for nesting including Swainson's hawk, red-tailed hawk, great-horned owl, and American kestrel. Most notably are the presence of nesting burrowing owls, a state-threatened species of greatest conservation need and Boulder County priority species of special concern. A bald eagle pair has been present since 2012.

An estimated 25 acres of wetlands and 6.1 miles of riparian corridors exist on the property. Between 1998 and 2011, the department invested substantial time and money towards two wetland and five stream restoration and stabilization projects. Since 2019, a resident beaver family is using Rock Creek within the planning area. Critical wildlife habitats are designated for northern leopard frogs. Also, active prairie dog colonies are present on the property.



Issues

- ▶ Proximity of regional trail to burrowing owl and eagle nests, causing disturbance to nesting
- ▶ Degradation of restored riparian areas with livestock grazing and prairie dog expansion
- ▶ Mature and mid-age trees dying along Rock Creek and Buffalo Gulch
- ▶ Increased stormwater runoff from neighboring development into creeks
- ▶ Increasing population of noxious weeds along riparian corridors
- ▶ Glacier Park wetland has diminished in size due to changes in hydrology
- ▶ Lack of diversity in some wetlands

Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Consolidate, preserve, or increase large contiguous habitat area for wildlife
- ▶ Additional restoration and planting along riparian corridors
- ▶ Improve fencing in riparian areas
- ▶ Water quality sampling to examine vegetation health in riparian areas
- ▶ Construct off-stream watering infrastructure for livestock
- ▶ Monitor beaver activity
- ▶ Introduce prescribed fire as a control method for cattails

Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Balancing natural resource preservation, public access, and agricultural operations

Topic: Grassland Restoration

Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm has over 490 acres of rangeland that is presently degraded and could benefit from restoration. Currently there are over 64 acres of significant natural communities—including two riparian communities and a blue grama native grassland community. Two past projects have restored native grassland buffers along Buffalo Gulch.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Extensive bare ground and loss of soil
- ▶ Lack of perennial grass cover
- ▶ Several invasive weed species
- ▶ Prairie dog and cattle grazing impacts to grassland vegetation
- ▶ Old data for existing conditions (from 2003 and 2008)

Opportunities to explore

- ▶ Restore perennial plant species
- ▶ Clarify tenant vs. BCPOS responsibilities for weed management
- ▶ Re-inventory wetlands and significant natural grassland communities
- ▶ Assess and refine fencing locations
- ▶ Establish best management practices
- ▶ Prairie dog population density mitigation to restore ground cover of perennial grasses

Constraints to consider

- ▶ Challenges of managing prairie dog populations
- ▶ Lack of available forage for grazing outside of riparian areas
- ▶ Existing weed density

Topic: Prairie Dog Management

The property contains a designated 99-acre Habitat Conservation Area and an additional 862 acres designated as Multi-Objective Areas with prairie dog active colonies.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Prairie dog impacts to significant vegetation communities, native grassland, pasture grass, farm crops, ground cover, and riparian corridor understory
- ▶ Prairie dog encroachment from 40-acre preserve onto surrounding No Prairie Dog designated croplands
- ▶ Prairie dog encroachment from open space onto adjacent private lands
- ▶ Prairie dog burrows encroaching onto trails

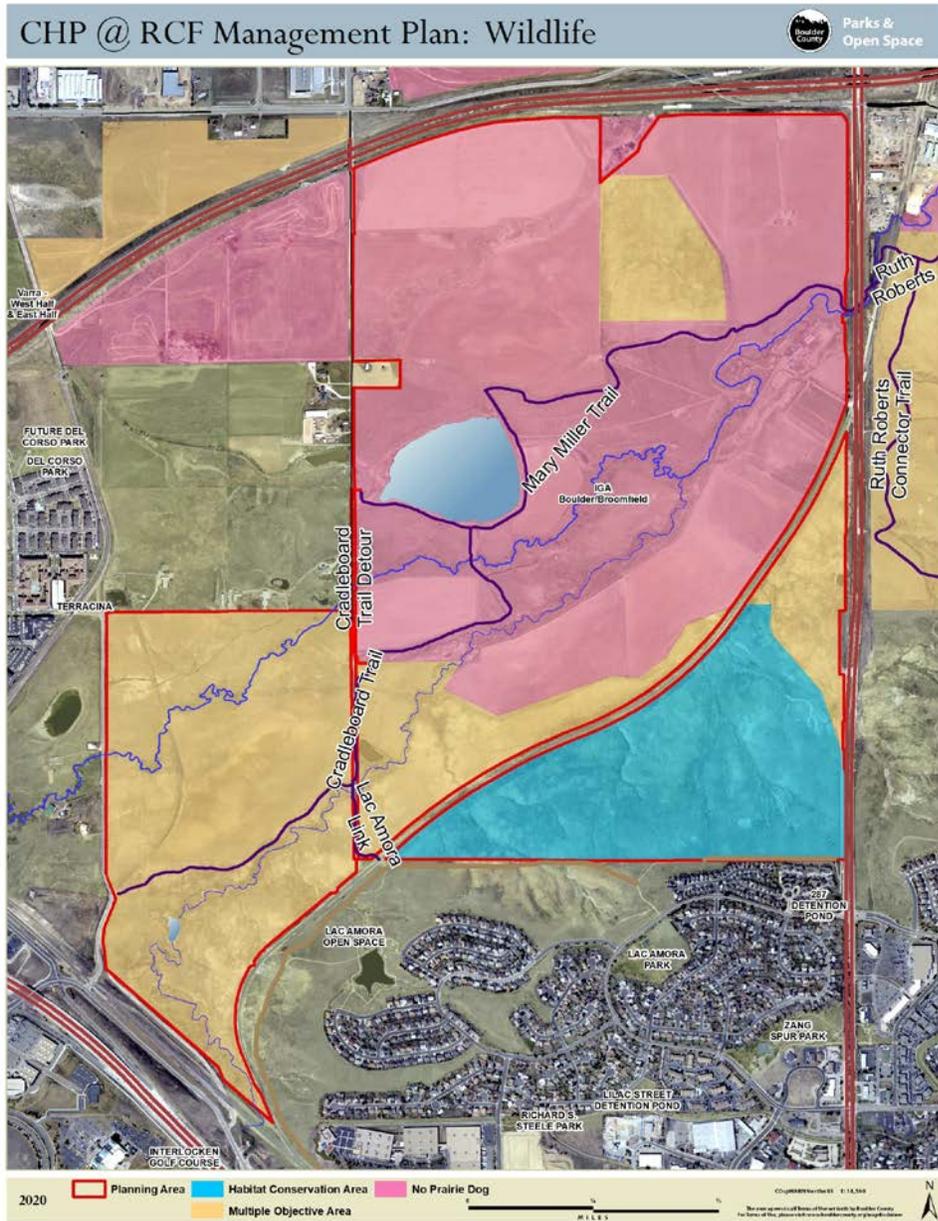
Opportunities to Explore

- ▶ Potential to consolidate and preserve/increase large contiguous habitat area for prairie dogs
- ▶ Potential to reduce density of current population to improve vegetation condition
- ▶ Consider creating riparian corridor buffers to protect from disturbance
- ▶ Maintain population of prairie dogs to support local bio-diversity

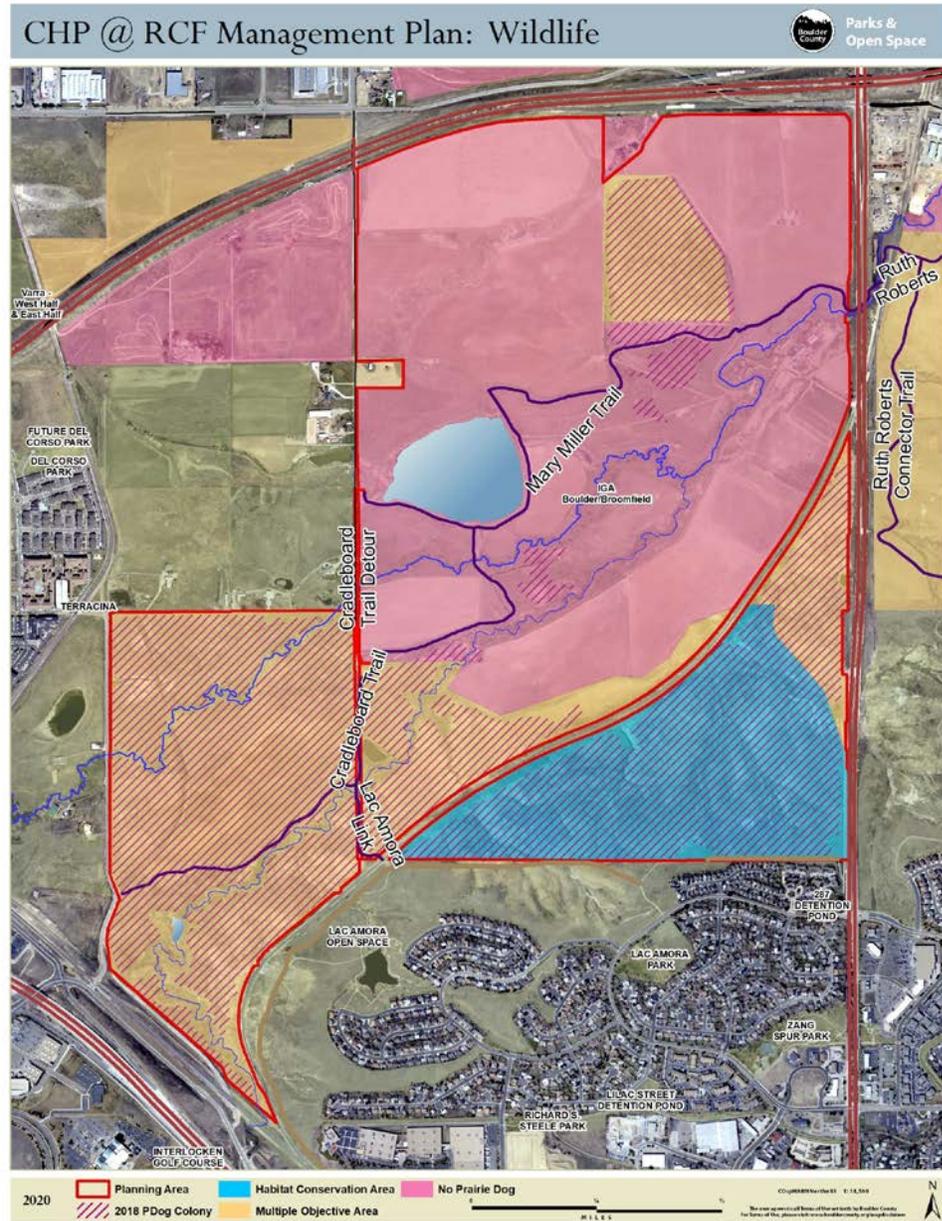
Constraints to Consider

- ▶ Balancing natural resource preservation, public access, and agricultural operations

Prairie Dog Land Designations



2019 Prairie Dog Colonies



Topic: Birds of Prey Foundation Operations

The Birds of Prey Foundation is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation organization that operates on portions of the Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm property under a lease agreement with BCPOS. These operations include the intake, rehabilitation, and release of injured birds of prey and captive propagation of species. Rehabilitative flight cages are located on the east side of the property along Rock Creek and their intensive care unit is housed on the west side along 104th Street.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ Birds of Prey Foundation flight cages are located within the floodway on east side of property.
- ▶ Birds of Prey Foundation is interested in expanding facilities on the west side of the property.

Opportunities to explore

- ▶ Potential to expand Birds of Prey Foundation facilities, off South 104th St.

Constraints to consider

- ▶ Leases and other real estate agreements
- ▶ Utility easements and other contractual obligations including oil & gas operations
- ▶ Floodplain regulations

Topic: Standard Operating Procedures

BCPOS has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to define the process carried out in communicating and coordinating a change to regular operations or use. The development and use of SOPs are an integral part of a successful quality system as it provides individuals with the information to perform a job properly and facilitates consistency in the quality and integrity of a product or end result.



Areas of Concern

- ▶ BCPOS coordination with tenants and advance notice for seasonal wildlife and trail closures
- ▶ Tenants coordination with BCPOS resource teams and advance notice on operational changes that may be considered significant changes or projects

Opportunities to explore

- ▶ Review protocols on use of historic buildings
- ▶ Review protocols on seasonal wildlife closures
- ▶ Review protocols for mitigating potential impacts to cultural resources and paleontology
- ▶ Improve agency and stakeholder partnerships with proactive coordination
- ▶ Create Ag Operating Plan for property in conjunction with management plan.

Constraints to consider

- ▶ Lease agreements
- ▶ Conservation easement agreements

Update Planning process

Internal Scoping (Fall 2019)

- Renewed vision
- Desired future conditions
- What's working
- Focused changes
- Data gaps



Initial Public Comment (March/April 2020)

- Open house
- Online survey
- POSAC update



Plan Development (May-July 2020)

- Existing conditions
- Options assessment
- Staff preferred alternative(s)



Public Review (Aug./Sept. 2020)

- Public meetings
- Site visit(s)
- 30-day public comment



Plan Adoption (Fall 2020)

- Revise to reflect public comments
- POSAC hearing
- BOCC hearing