

Larimer County and Fort Collins team up to preserve 3,500 acres for open space



The view west from Red Mountain Open Space toward Hawk Canyon Ranch, which Larimer County has agreed to buy for \$3.5 million. *Larimer County*

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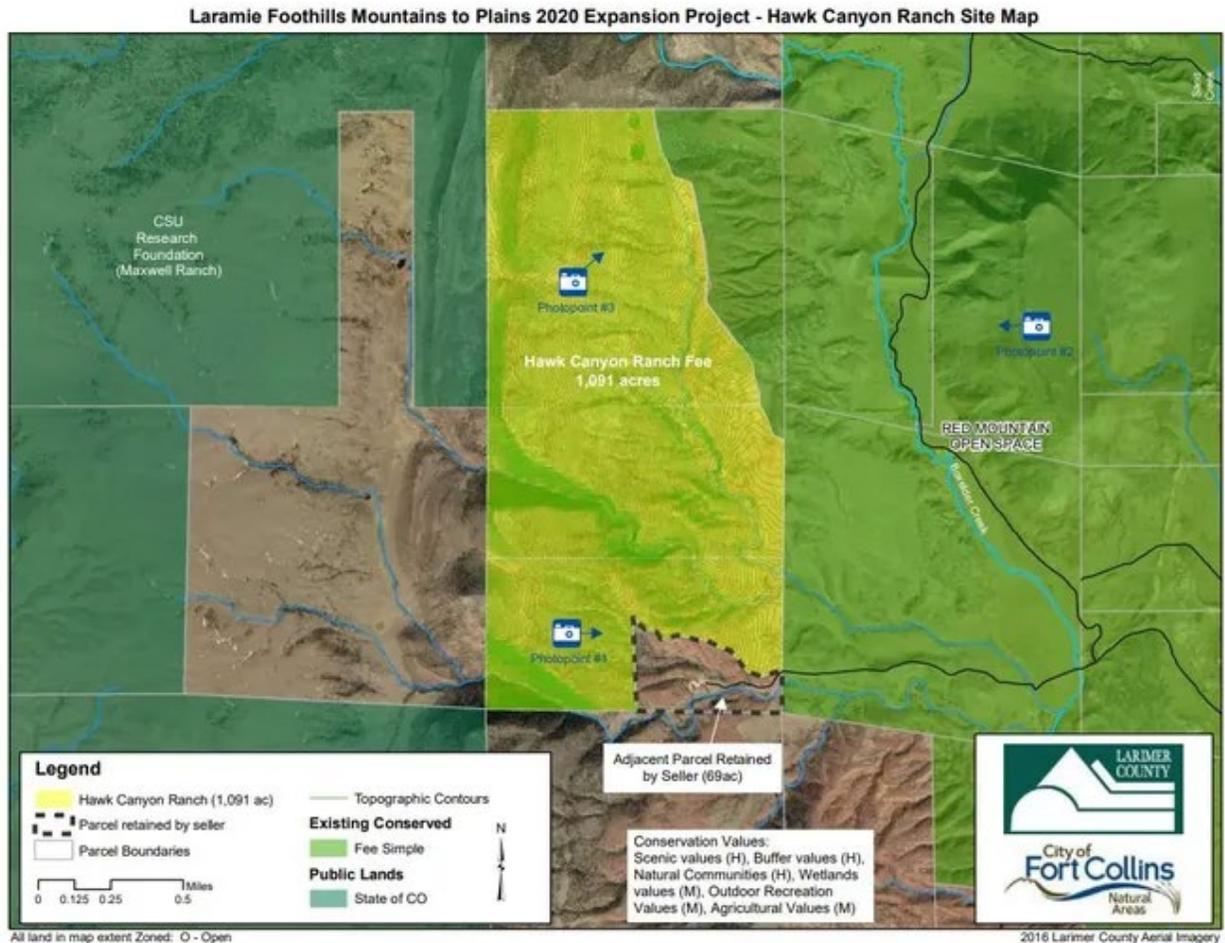
More than 3,500 acres of ranch land north of Wellington is expected to be preserved as open space under a new agreement between Fort Collins and Larimer County.

The Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains 2020 Expansion Project would buy or place conservation easements on five ranches near Red Mountain Open Space, Soapstone Prairie Natural Area or the Roberts Ranch Conservation Easement.

The Larimer County commissioners on Tuesday approved the first piece of the project by agreeing to buy the 1,029-acre Hawk Canyon Ranch, which sits on the west side of the county-owned Red Mountain Open Space.

The county will pay \$3.5 million for the ranch. The deal is expected to close Oct. 16, said Justin Core, a land agent for the county.

The cost will be covered by \$1,066,975 from Fort Collins Natural Areas; \$1,981,525 from Larimer County Natural Resources; \$450,000 from Great Outdoors Colorado, or GOCO; and \$1,500 from Friends of Larimer County Parks and Open Lands.



A map showing the location of Hawk Canyon Ranch, which Larimer County plans to buy for \$3.5 million. *Larimer County*

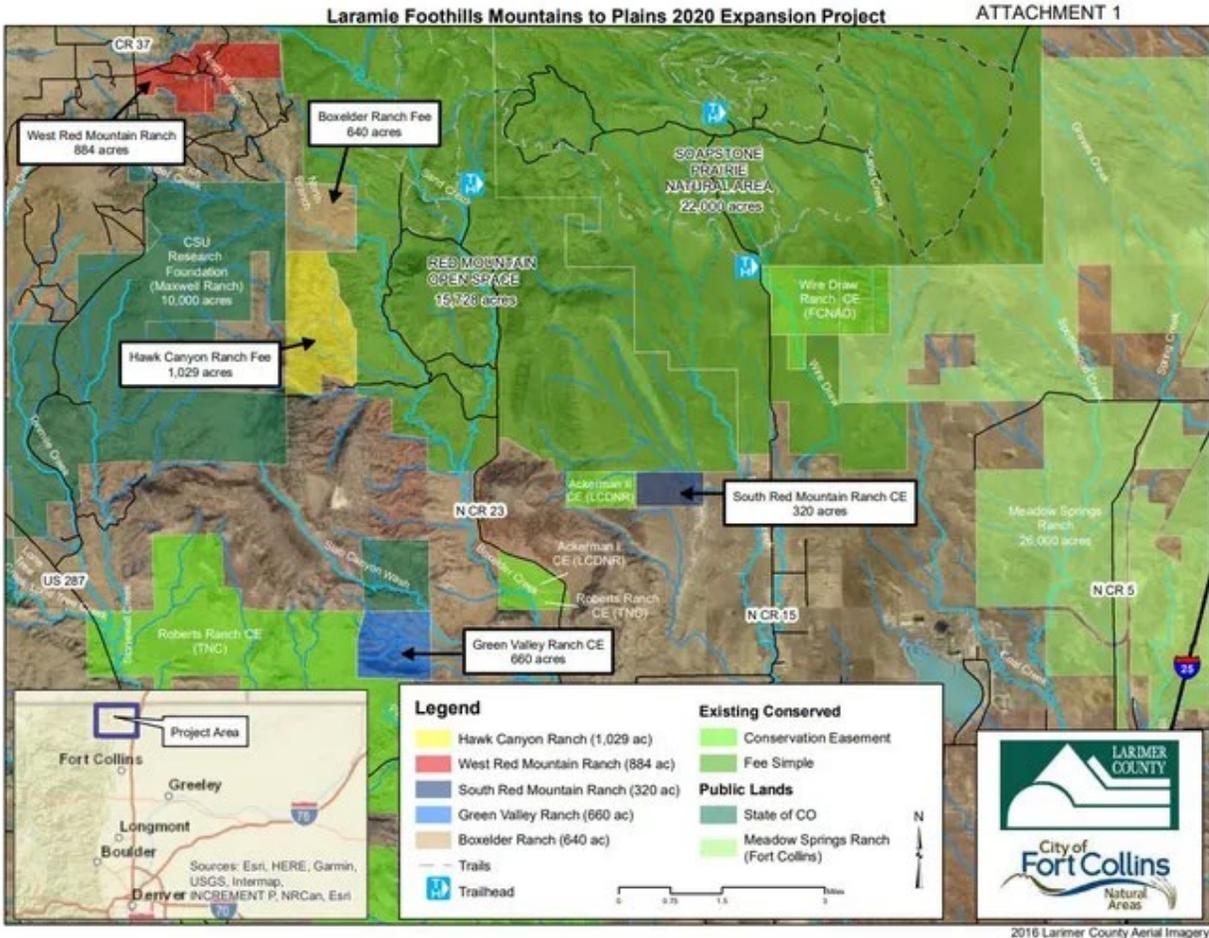
Fort Collins and Larimer County both have 0.25% sales taxes dedicated to open space programs.

Conserving Hawk Canyon Ranch will preserve the viewshed from Red Mountain Open Space’s trail system as well as significant wildlife habitat, said Meegan Flenniken, land conservation manager for Larimer County Natural Resources.

“This property is highly developable, so just keeping the character of the area and that quality experience you have now is one of the key benefits,” Flenniken told the commissioners. “And then long-term it is a placeholder; if we have a need to expand the trail system, we certainly could onto this property.”

Hunting would be allowed on the property, just as it is on Red Mountain Open Space. The ranch sits on the eastern side of the 10,000-acre Maxwell Ranch, which is owned by the Colorado State University Research Foundation.

The Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains project began in 2004. Over the years it has conserved more than 60,000 acres of open space through agreements involving the city, the county, The Nature Conservancy, GOCO and other partners.



A map showing properties that would be added to the Laramie Foothills Mountain to Plains project. *Larimer County*

Flenniken said the program was reinvigorated by a \$812,476 grant from GOCO that was announced in June.

Negotiations are underway to purchase or place conservation easements on four more properties in the area: West Red Mountain Ranch, 884 acres; South Red Mountain Ranch, 320 acres; Green Valley Ranch, 660 acres; and Boxelder Ranch, 640 acres.

The total cost of the expansion project is expected to be about \$8.4 million, with the county covering 65% of the cost and Fort Collins paying 35%.

Announcements about the other deals are expected to come over the next few months.

Carter Lake, Horsetooth parking lots and roads to get \$11.6 million boost

Federal grant will contribute \$8.6 million



Mary and Larry Leonard of Loveland get their sailboat ready to launch Tuesday in the North Pines parking lot at Carter Lake southwest of Loveland. Larimer County got an \$8.6 million federal grant for road and parking lot improvements at Carter Lake at Horsetooth Reservoir. Mary said “It is so bad. You can’t even put the mast up because you’re bumping all over the roads,” referring to the rough access roads and parking lots at Carter Lake, where they sail often. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

By PAMELA JOHNSON | johnsonp@reporter-herald.com | Loveland Reporter-Herald
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The roads and parking lots at Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir will get a nearly \$12 million boost within the coming years.

Officials with the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced Tuesday an \$8.6 million Federal Lands Access Project grant for the two reservoirs. The county will add \$3 million to complete the nearly \$12 million project.

“The reservoir properties are aging, aging infrastructure,” Jennifer Almstead, a specialist with the Natural Resources Department, said at the Tuesday county commissioners meeting. “These improvements will make a significant impact so that reservoirs, as popular as they are, can keep up with visitor demand now and into the future.”

Horsetooth Reservoir and Carter Lake are both owned by the Bureau of Reclamation as water storage facilities that are part of the Colorado-Big Thompson Water Project. The county manages recreation on the waters and the surrounding properties — a partnership that has been in place since 1954.

Together, the bureau and the Natural Resources Department obtained the federal grant for the paving and infrastructure project, which will be managed by the Central Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration. The design and federal permitting process are expected to occur from 2021 through 2023, with construction expected to begin the following year, 2024.

The commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved a memorandum of agreement and a project agreement with the Central Lands Highway Division for the projects.

The work will focus on paving, striping and redoing existing parking lots and roads to make them safer, to cut down on congestion and to help with dust mitigation.

County officials said the work will cut back on parking control, grading and dust management that county crews now handle, freeing them up for other work, and will improve the overall visitor experience at both popular reservoirs.



A parking lot at the North Pines area of Carter Lake overlooks sailboats Tuesday at Carter Lake southwest of Loveland. (Jenny Sparks / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

The planned improvements will “extend the useful life” of the facilities to ensure that the two reservoirs, which see more than 1.3 million annual visitors, will be able to meet the increasing demand, according to the memorandum of agreement for the project.

The projects at Horsetooth, west of Fort Collins, include the entrance into South Bay and the upper and lower parking lots at that area, safety improvements on the turn on County Road 38E, the access road and parking lot at Inlet Bay and construction of a trail that will allow people to walk between South Bay and Inlet Bay.

At Carter Lake, southwest of Loveland, several areas that are currently soft-surface or crushed asphalt will be paved and striped. These include the two entrance stations, parking lots at South Shore and the marina, and main access roads into Eagle Campground and North Pines Campground, as well as parking lots at those sites.

“We’re running 2020 visitation numbers on the back of a county park system built on the level of 1990 visitation,” said Ken Brink Jr., visitor services manager. These improvements, he said, will allow for a better experience for those who enjoy the parks and for those who maintain and work there.

All three commissioners spoke of the partnerships between the county and the federal government that led to the grant and ultimately to the money to complete needed work.

“This is wonderful; this is good news,” Commissioner John Kefalas said. “It’s nice to have good news.”

Larimer County buying 1,091-acre ranch for open space north of Fort Collins

Hawk Canyon Ranch adds to Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains project



A view of Hawk Canyon Ranch, which the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is buying to add to more than 60,000 acres of preserved land in Northern Larimer County. (Charlie Johnson / Larimer County Department of Natural Resources)

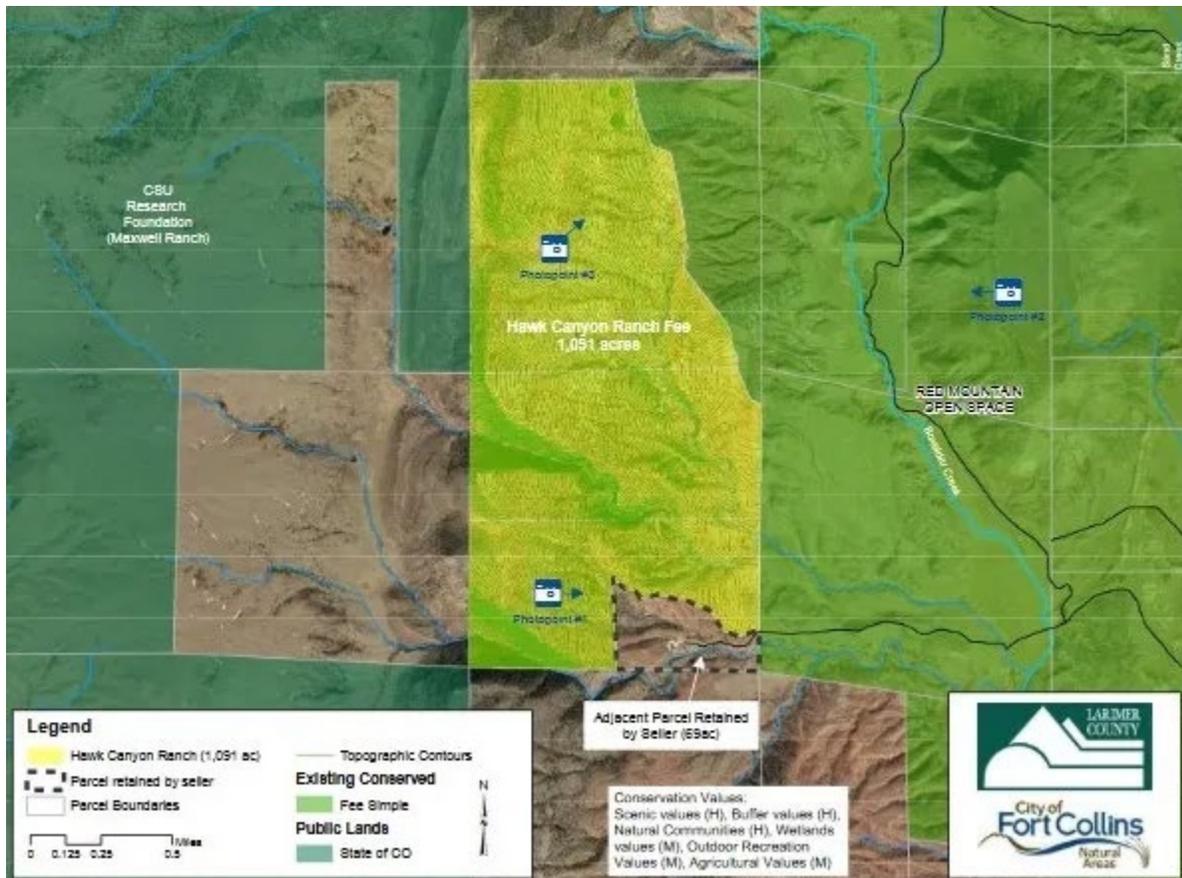
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Larimer County is buying a 1,091-acre ranch for \$3.5 million to add onto more than 60,000 acres of preserved property in the northern section of the county.

The Larimer County commissioners on Tuesday approved the purchase of Hawk Canyon Ranch, which shares a 2-mile border with Red Mountain Open Space that is located north of Fort Collins.



Larimer County is buying a 1,091-acre ranch for \$3.5 million to add onto more than 60,000 acres of preserved property in the northern section of the county.

The property, which is rugged terrain in some areas and includes wildlife habitat and important plant species, ties into an overall effort to protect lands in an area known as the Laramie Foothill Mountains to Plains project, according to information from the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

Working together since 2004, Larimer County, Fort Collins, Great Outdoors Colorado, local land owners and local land trusts have preserved more than 60,000 acres in the northern county including Red Mountain and the adjacent Soapstone Prairie Natural Area. This purchase adds onto those properties as part of the overall project, said Meegan Flenniken, resource specialist with Larimer County.

The county is buying the property from Hawk Canyon Ranch LLC and Carla's Hawk LLC with a closing scheduled for Oct. 16. Of the \$3.5 million sale price, Larimer County will pay \$1.98 million, Fort Collins will kick in nearly \$1.07 million, a Great Outdoors Colorado grant will cover \$450,000, and the nonprofit Friends of Larimer County contributed \$1,500.

The Great Outdoors Colorado portion is part of an overall \$812,000 grant, and this is the first of five projects that Larimer County hopes to bring forward in coming months to add to the Laramie Foothills project, Flenniken explained.

“When GoCo offered the grant opportunity this past spring, it was a great catalyst to reinvigorate that project and look toward some of the additional lands we wanted to conserve, particularly bordering Red

Mountain Open Space and Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, which are two public access areas in the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains project,” she said.

Initially, the county will expand its current Red Mountain Open Space grazing leases and hunting access for deer, elk and pronghorn onto the new land, Flenniken said.

“One of the short-term and long-term benefits is, being such a visual backdrop to the existing trails system at the open space, this property is highly developable, so just keeping the character of the area and that quality experience you have now is one of the key benefits,” Flenniken said.

“Then long-term, it is a placeholder. If we have a need to expand the trail system we probably could onto this property.”