



2020

Larimer County Natural Resources

QUARTERLY BOARD REPORT
3RD QUARTER (JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER)



In Memory, Never Forgotten
Ranger Brendan Unitt
End of Watch: August 20, 2020

Sprucing up our Nest

Long-awaited improvements flew to the finish this summer at Eagle's Nest Open Space. Staff improved visibility of the main entrance sign by shifting its orientation and built a new sign display for the trailhead, which was rotting and falling apart. Staff also worked to get water well permits from the state for two livestock watering areas and redeveloped the well to meet industry standards. A solar panel was installed to work in conjunction with the well. New fencing was also installed around the water wells to protect sensitive riparian areas from livestock damage. Each of these improvements work together to improve our visitors' experience at the open space while protecting the resource and the agricultural heritage for the future.



Department staff re-position the entrance sign during improvement work this summer.



Red Mountain District Manager, Steve Gibson, stands near the permitted water well with the solar panel in the distance and up-close (bottom photo).



Staff members (L to R) Roger Stoleberger, Jayson Bomar, and Shane Fraser stop for a moment at the interpretive amphitheater to enjoy the results of their hard work.

Take a seat at Hermit Park

Despite being a year of event cancellations and no in-person group education, Hermit Park Open Space (HPOS) staff took this unusual time as an opportunity to design, construct, and install a new interpretive amphitheater nestled within the trees near Hermit's Cabin. By utilizing hand-carved split logs from the site as seating benches, the project was completed with minimal cost yet offers a valued amenity for visitors. It features a group fire ring for the return of Campfire Talks and graduated seating for unobstructed viewing. The interpretive amphitheater can seat up to 50 people, making it a future hub for education, events, and group gatherings.

Infusion of \$8.6 million to improve aging roads at reservoir parks

In partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation, DNR has been approved for federal funding from the Colorado Federal Lands Access Program totaling \$8.6 million, with a \$3 million dollar match by Larimer County. The project will deliver ten significant road and infrastructure improvements at Horsetooth and Carter Lake reservoirs. The project will offer greater roadway accessibility and pedestrian/bike safety – all of which improve visitor experience. The project includes repaving and restriping several large parking areas at both reservoirs for improved configurations. Additional vehicle capacity and greater efficiencies for Aquatic Nuisance Species boat inspections will also be gained. Engineering will begin next year through 2023. Construction would follow in 2025.



The Larimer County Board of County Commissioners, Bureau of Reclamation representatives, and DNR leadership and staff officially accept \$8.6 million in funding from Federal Lands Access Program at a check ceremony this September.

Red Mountain Open Space grows by 1,091 acres



Hawk Canyon Ranch, courtesy Charlie Johnson.

Larimer County finalized the purchase of the 1,091-acre Hawk Canyon Ranch, which will provide an over two-mile buffer and scenic backdrop to Red Mountain Open Space (RMOS). Managed by Larimer County as part of RMOS, the property is a significant addition due to its high ecological and scenic values. The acquisition includes Larimer County's \$3.5 million dollar fee purchase and conveyance of a conservation easement on the land to the City of Fort Collins. This priority project is one of four ranches recently identified for conservation in the Laramie Foothills area and supported through a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Open Space grant awarded this June.



Plumeless thistle, a new invasive weed detected in Larimer County. Photo courtesy Maxine Guill.

New noxious weed discovered in Larimer County

Larimer County Weed District is working to minimize existing weed problems in the county and eliminate new invaders before they take hold. This August, Land Stewardship staff discovered Plumeless thistle (*Carduus acanthoides*) for the first time in Larimer County (on Storm Mountain near Drake) and are working to eliminate this new invader before it becomes established and increases in size and density. Mostly found in mountain valleys, it is common and aggressive in Garfield, Pitkin, and Eagle counties.

Upgrades to Soldier Canyon Dam at Horsetooth Reservoir coming this fall

An important infrastructure maintenance project (Horsetooth Outlet Project or HOP) slated to repair and upgrade Soldier Canyon Dam at Horsetooth Reservoir is being completed by Northern Water and the Bureau of Reclamation this fall. To accomplish this work, water levels in the reservoir have lowered to levels not seen in several years. Maintenance will occur from October through November 2020. Following the completion of the work, inflows will resume to the reservoir with the anticipation of normal operations in 2021. This outlet delivers water to over 200,000 businesses and residents in Fort Collins and surrounding areas. Mandatory water restrictions on lawn watering and other outdoor water uses have been issued to avoid a water shortage due to ongoing severe drought, the Cameron Peak fire, and the infrastructure repairs.



Water levels at Horsetooth Reservoir have lowered this summer in anticipation of HOP.



Karla Estrem, June Employee of the Month.

Karla Estrem - Larimer County Employee of the Month

This past June, Karla Estrem, Senior Accounting Technician, was recognized as Larimer County's Employee of the Month. Karla has been with DNR for five years and is responsible for processing revenues for our department. Karla has continually risen to the challenge during the pandemic including addressing the need to continue offering park permits to the public during closure. Previously only available to purchase in person, Karla spearheaded a new process to allow disabled citizens and veterans to purchase their permits online. Her foresight, hard work, and willingness to adapt to serve others is an instrumental asset to the team and citizens of Larimer County.

Financial Summary

Larimer County Natural Resources Department has five primary revenue sources including Colorado lottery proceeds, the open spaces sales tax, user fees on open spaces properties, user fees on reservoir parks properties, and the

weed district property tax. Below are the July 1 through September 30 revenue summaries, annual and daily permit sales, and camping reservation nights compared to the same period the previous year.

Year to Date Revenue (through September 30th 2020)

	2019	2020	% Change
Colorado Lottery	\$644,288	\$519,957	-19%
Open Spaces Sales Tax	\$4,890,808	\$4,906,269	0%
Open Spaces Generated User Fees*	\$944,000	\$1,174,135	24%
Reservoir Parks Generated User Fees*	\$3,796,195	\$4,612,341	21%
Weed District Property Tax	\$627,824	\$736,581	17%

*User fees include those for entrance, camping, special events, group use areas, and penalty assessments

Year to Date Number of Permit Sales (through September 30th 2020)

	2019	2020	% Change
Open Spaces			
Annual Permits	1,438	1,817	26%
Daily Permits	50,798	61,818	22%
Reservoir Parks			
Annual Permits	8,816	11,140	26%
Daily Permits	137,277	180,454	31%

Year to Date Camping Reservation Nights (through September 30th 2020)

	2019	2020	% Change
Open Spaces	7,607	9,483	25%
Reservoir Parks	40,311	39,878	-1%



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Department of Natural Resources
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