

2017

Larimer County

Natural Resources

Annual Report



OUR MISSION

To establish, protect and manage significant regional parks and open lands providing quality outdoor recreational opportunities and stewardship of natural resource values. We are committed to fostering a sense of community and appreciation for the natural and agricultural heritage of Larimer County for present and future generations.



Red Mountain Open Space, Photo © Harry Strharsky

ACHIEVING A MILESTONE IN LAND CONSERVATION

The above photo, showing two hikers looking west across Red Mountain Open Space to the peaks of the Front Range, has become an emblematic image for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. It exemplifies the balance between conservation and recreation we strive to achieve every day.

On Jan. 10, 2018, the department reached the significant milestone of 50,000 acres of land conserved in Larimer County. As we've worked to acquire and protect open space in the county over many decades, we've sought to maintain this balance, seeking opportunities to offer outdoor recreation while ensuring these lands maintain their intrinsic values.

Red Mountain Open Space is a prime example of this balance. Portions of the 14,980-acre open space are accessible to hikers, bikers and outdoor enthusiasts, while others are set aside to protect wildlife habitat, cultural sites and rare plant communities and support ranching and agriculture.

As you peruse this report, you'll see examples of ways we seek to maintain this balance. Last year, we conserved large tracts of land in the Horsetooth area, pioneered a water deal that sets a model for protecting farmland and took a proactive approach to an exotic tree pest. At the same time, we built

several miles of natural surface and paved trails and offered a myriad of ways to enjoy the outdoors.

Of course, none of our accomplishments over the past year – or the 50,000-acre milestone – would be possible without the ongoing support of our partners, funders and all of you who live, work and play in Larimer County. So, thank you for continually supporting conservation and recreation!

Thank you as well to our professional staff, our outstanding citizen advisory boards and especially to our Board of County Commissioners for their guidance and support.

On your next hike, boat ride or fishing trip, take a moment to ponder the balance we all can achieve as both recreationists and stewards. Now, get outdoors and play!

Gary Buffington

Director, Department of Natural Resources

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources 2017 Annual Report

Published: May 2018

Cover photo: Horsetooth Mountain Open Space
© Brendan Bombaci

Larimer County Government Officials

Board of County Commissioners: Lew Gaiter III, Steve Johnson, Tom Donnelly

County Manager: Linda Hoffmann

Director, Community Planning and Infrastructure: Todd Blomstrom

THANK YOU to Our Citizen Advisory Boards

Open Lands Advisory Board

Back: Gary Buffington*, Ward Nelson, Carl Sorrentino, Sherri Valentine, Peter Kelly (chair)

Middle: Jeff Hindman, Commissioner Tom Donnelly, Marilyn Hilgenberg, K-Lynn Cameron, Suzan Fritchel

Front: David Marvin, Nancy Wallace, Meegan Flenniken*, Jason Brothers, Charlie Johnson*

Not pictured: Alex Castino*, Chris Fleming*, Steve Gibson*, Gerry Horak, Tim Meyer*

*Staff



Photo by Charlie Johnson

Parks Advisory Board

Back: Chris Klaas, Rob Harris, Mark DeGregorio, Frank Gillespie, Russell Fruits (chair), Michael Robinson, Deborah Shulman, Brian Rasch, Stephanie Hansen

Front: Ken Brink*, Gary Buffington*, Dan Rieves*, Mark Caughlan*

Not pictured: Steve Ambrose, Nick Clark, Commissioner Steve Johnson, Pat McCusker

*Staff



Photo by Charlie Johnson

Land Stewardship Advisory Board

Back: Maxine Guill*, Richard "Hitch" McCulloch, Casey Cisneros*, Gary Buffington*, Timothy Koski

Front: Ken Mathias, Ernie Marx (chair), Meegan Flenniken*

Not pictured: Commissioner Lew Gaiter III

*Staff



Larimer County File Photo

BRINGING LARIMER COUNTY'S AMAZING SCENERY TO YOUR SMARTPHONE

Follow @LCNaturalResources on Instagram for images of the stunning scenery, wildlife and outdoor recreation that you love in Larimer County.



Instagram



Left to right: Photos © Charlie Johnson, Ronny Castiglioni, Zach Schierl, Mark Yoder and Jeff Andersen



CONSERVATION

50,000 Acres Conserved in Larimer County

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources has crested the 50,000-acre milestone for land conservation in the county. Hooray! In total, the department has conserved 50,266 acres since 1982, when Larimer County first acquired the land that is now Horsetooth Mountain Open Space thanks to a citizen-initiated ballot measure. These acres consist of land purchased outright by Larimer County, placed under a conservation easement held by the County, or conserved by a partner with financial or other support from the County. This milestone was made possible thanks to the citizens of Larimer County who have continually voted in favor of open space, as well as the many partners, funders, landowners and others who have supported the department's conservation efforts. Thank you!



Located in the foothills west of Fort Collins, the new properties contain rocky ridgelines, forested hillsides, rolling grasslands and mountain mahogany shrublands. Photo © Charlie Johnson

PROTECTING LAND IN THE HORSETOOTH AREA

Over the course of nearly a year, Larimer County and the City of Fort Collins closed on a series of four land acquisitions south and west of Horsetooth Reservoir totaling 2,492 acres, with the final deal closing in the early part of 2018. Many of these acquisitions were more than a decade in the making.

All the newly conserved land is adjacent to existing open space, including Horsetooth Mountain Open Space, Devil's Backbone Open Space and Coyote Ridge Natural Area.

Of the 2,492 acres, 1,359 acres were fee transactions, meaning either Larimer County or Fort Collins owns the land outright, and 1,133 acres were conservation easements, meaning only the development rights were purchased and the land remains privately owned. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) provided \$4.8 million, or 42%, of the total acquisition costs.

This year, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources staff will conduct plant, wildlife, historical and archaeological surveys of the properties. The future of these lands, including any public access or outdoor recreation, will be determined through public planning processes over the coming years.

For a fact sheet on the transactions and a map showing the new properties, visit www.larimer.org/naturalresources (search under Spotlights).

THE LAND IN THE HORSETOOTH AREA WAS CONSERVED TO PROTECT THE FOLLOWING VALUES:



Whether preserving open space, piloting water-sharing agreements or preparing for exotic tree pests, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources is working to further conservation across our great county for the benefit of present and future generations.

NAVIGATING NEW WATERS

Larimer County's agricultural heritage is in jeopardy, as farmland and water rights are continually converted to other uses. In 2016, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources purchased a 211-acre farm to help buck this trend but needed to offset the high cost of the farm's water.

To do so, the department convened a team of experts in water, agriculture and law to determine how much water the farm needed to be viable, and how much water could be sold or shared.

With this knowledge in a Farm and Water Viability Plan, the department was able to reach a deal last year with the City and County of Broomfield. Some shares of water were sold outright to Broomfield and most were kept by Larimer County, with a number to be shared. This water-sharing agreement is known as an Alternative Transfer Method (ATM), which is being promoted in Colorado's Water Plan as a way to keep farmland viable while providing water for municipal and industrial needs.

Through this deal, Larimer County and Broomfield implemented Colorado's first perpetual agriculture-to-municipal ATM, creating a model for others in land and water conservation to follow. For details on the agreement and the farm's water portfolio, visit www.larimer.org/naturalresources.



By reaching a deal with Broomfield, Larimer County offset the cost of the farm and its water by 46%, while retaining enough water for the farm to be viable in perpetuity.
Photo © Charlie Johnson

ANTICIPATING A TREE PEST

The emerald ash borer is spreading across the Front Range of Colorado. An infestation of the exotic tree pest has been confirmed in Boulder County about 4 miles south of the Larimer County line.

Taking a proactive approach to the emerald ash borer, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources removed 72 of the 89 ash trees in its campgrounds and trailheads last year. The remaining 17 ash trees, deemed worth saving by the County forester, will be treated to prevent them from getting the insect once it is confirmed in Larimer County.

To offset the removed ash trees, the department planted a variety of site-adapted trees last year, including bur oak and Rocky Mountain maple, at its campgrounds and trailheads.



Where an ash tree once stood, crews plant a tree of a different genus. Trees were replanted to provide shade for campers and help collect runoff. Photo © Dave Lentz

LOOKING AHEAD

With \$1.5 million in grant funding now secured and department funds allocated, Larimer County will begin restoring the Cache la Poudre River at River Bluffs Open Space this fall. Work is needed to make the river and its floodplain more resilient during flooding and ensure it provides healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

This year, Larimer County will install boot brush stations at four of its trailheads to educate visitors on a best practice to help prevent the spread of noxious weeds. The stations are a joint project among Larimer County, City of Fort Collins, Boulder County, U.S. Forest Service and Colorado Department of Agriculture.

In 2017, Larimer County secured in-stream flow rights for Sand and Boxelder creeks on Red Mountain Open Space through the Colorado Water Conservation Board, which holds the rights. In addition to these waterways, Larimer County is in the process of securing in-stream flow rights for several other perennial creeks and streams that flow through its conserved properties.



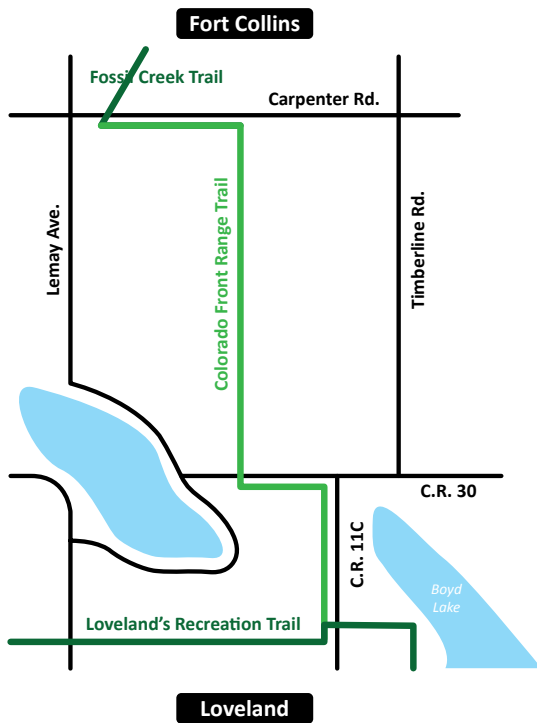
RECREATION



Elected officials and staff from Larimer County, City of Loveland and City of Fort Collins cut the ribbon on the Colorado Front Range Trail. Photo © Amanda Maier



Cyclists use the new trail shortly after the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Photo © Amanda Maier



CONNECTING OUR CITIES' PAVED TRAIL NETWORKS

On Nov. 14, 2017, the first paved trail connecting Loveland and Fort Collins officially opened to the public. After a ribbon-cutting ceremony, eager bikers joined elected officials and staff on a joy ride along the trail.

The 2-mile Colorado Front Range Trail - Loveland to Fort Collins Connection runs between Lemay Avenue and Timberline Road on the east side of the cities. It is open to foot traffic and non-motorized bikes.

By using this new trail, people can go from the 35 miles of paved trails in Fort Collins' system to the 18 miles of trails in Loveland's system without hopping off their bikes or getting in a vehicle.

The trail is a joint project among Larimer County, City of Loveland and City of Fort Collins, with funding from the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado Parks and Wildlife's State Trails Program.



Rangers practice administering medical care to an injured boater during Ranger Excellence School. Photo © Jeff Andersen

TRAINING RANGERS TO EXCEL

Every year, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources hosts Ranger Excellence School for rangers and other outdoor recreation professionals from across Colorado and beyond.

Established in 2011, the popular training conference offers classes over a week in a variety of areas, including self-defense, wilderness first aid, firearms, driving and swift water rescue. On the last day, a series of hands-on scenarios ties everything together. Along with training, Ranger Excellence School offers a venue for rangers who work on parks and open spaces to network and share ideas.

Ranger Excellence School is endorsed by the Colorado Open Space Alliance and Park Law Enforcement Association (PLEA). In 2018, it was honored with a President's Award from PLEA. Registration opens in the spring at www.larimer.org/naturalresources.



RANGER
EXCELLENCE SCHOOL
LARIMER COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources strives to offer top-notch services on its parks and open spaces, regularly improving its facilities, parking areas and trails to provide the best possible experience for its visitors.

OPENING NEW TRAILS AT HERMIT PARK

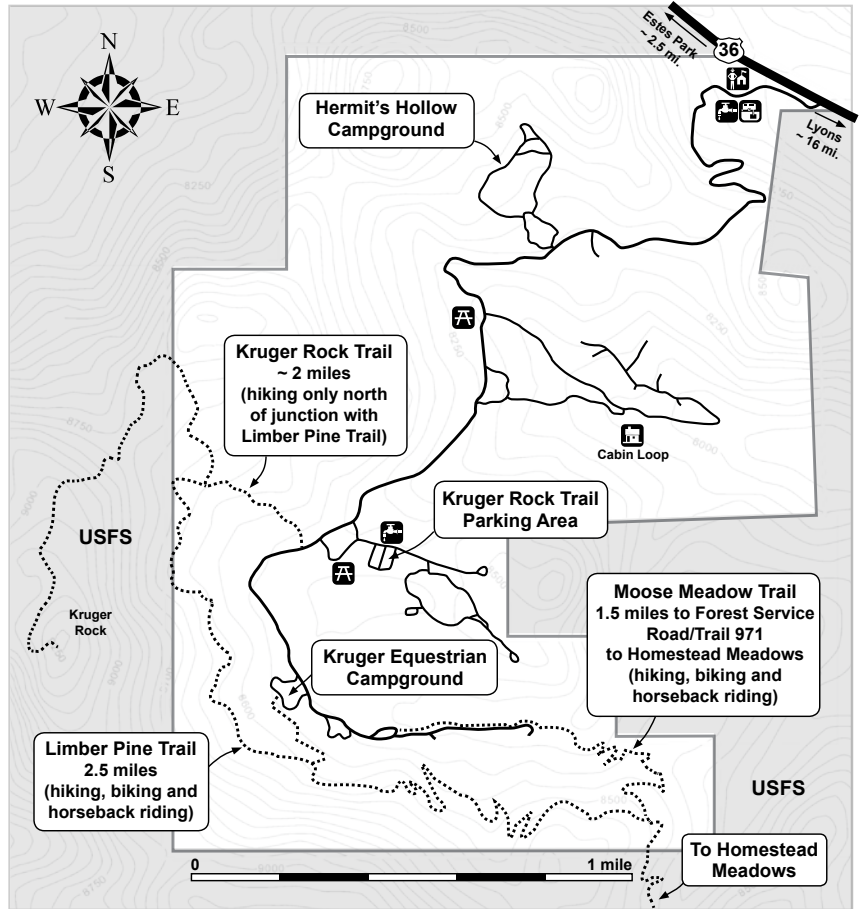
Last summer, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources opened two new trails at Hermit Park Open Space, both accessible to hikers, bikers and horses.

The Moose Meadow Trail travels 1.5 miles along a scenic, grassy area where moose are often seen, before heading south onto the national forest and leading to Homestead Meadows.

The Limber Pine Trail connects with the Moose Meadow Trail, Kruger Equestrian Campground and Kruger Rock Trail, meandering for 2.5 miles through forests of pine and aspen trees. Eventually, it will connect to the Hermit's Hollow Campground and a new trailhead planned for the saddle area.

The new trails were built by the department's trail crew with help from volunteers and Larimer County Conservation Corps crews.

In 2018, the department plans to complete the Limber Pine Trail and open new trailheads.



Volunteers were instrumental in building the new trails at Hermit Park Open Space, including interns from Hewlett-Packard (pictured above). Photo © Zac Tobias

LOOKING AHEAD

In late 2017, crews broke ground on a second paved trail connecting Loveland and Fort Collins' paved trail networks. The 4.4-mile Long View Trail will connect the trail networks on the west side of the cities and provide another safe, non-motorized alternative to traveling between them. It is a project among Larimer County, Loveland and Fort Collins. The trail is slated to open in the summer of 2018.

In April of this year, Larimer County wrapped up a renovation of the South Shore area of Carter Lake. The popular camping and day use area was upgraded with additional electric campsites, new restrooms, resurfaced parking areas and improved boat ramp access. New and existing campsites at South Shore can be booked at www.larimercamping.com or (800) 397-7795.

This year, Larimer County will renovate Forks Park, which was devastated during the Big Thompson River flood in 2013. The park, located in Drake where the North Fork Big Thompson River flows into the main stem, will feature a new parking area, restroom and river access for fishing. Along with the new infrastructure, the Colorado Department of Transportation is implementing restoration of the river through Forks Park, including improved flood mitigation and fish habitat.

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources offers educational and volunteer opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the natural world, make a difference on their parks and open spaces, and get into the great outdoors.

VOLUNTEERING TO BUILD A BETTER LARIMER COUNTY

Volunteers add tremendous capacity to Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. In 2017, nearly 200 volunteers donated their time and talents to enhance programs and services, by monitoring wildlife, hosting campgrounds, leading education programs, taking pictures, assisting rangers, patrolling and building trails, removing weeds, helping at events and performing many other duties. Thank you to all our amazing volunteers for their service!

This year, the department would like to recognize the following organizations and corporate groups for their ongoing commitment as volunteers:

Advanced Energy	Hewlett-Packard (HP)
ASU Northern Colorado Alumni Club	In-Situ
Centennial Bass Club	Intel
Colorado Addicted Trailbuilders Society	Larimer County Horseman's Association
Colorado College	Northern Colorado Astronomical Society
Colorado State Forest Service	Northern Colorado Climber's Coalition
Colorado State University	Overland Mountain Bike Club
Diamond Peaks Mountain Bike Patrol	SCHEELS
EKS&H	Sierra Club
Estes Park Cycling Coalition	Team B.O.B. (Babes on Bikes)
Friends of Larimer County Parks and Open Lands	Trailcology
Front Range Community College	YMCA of the Rockies



Members of the Northern Colorado Climber's Coalition help the department steward the climbing areas on the east side of Horsetooth Reservoir. Photo © Zac Tobias



Members of Team B.O.B., a women's mountain biking club, frequently assist the department's trail crew with trail projects and maintenance. Photo © Zac Tobias

CONNECTING KIDS TO THEIR LOCAL OPEN SPACE

Last summer, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources hosted a series of guided hikes for members of the local Boys & Girls Clubs.

During the hikes, kids ages 8-12 learned about wildlife, ecology and Leave No Trace ethics as they explored the open space closest to their homes. The Wellington club visited Red Mountain, Fort Collins club visited Horsetooth Mountain and west Loveland club visited Devil's Backbone.

The department regularly hosts special request programs for community groups. To request a program, visit www.larimer.org/NReducation.



County educator Andy Grinstead helps a child cross Sand Creek. Photo © Boys & Girls Clubs of Larimer County

LOOKING AHEAD

Why does the Devil's Backbone jut out of the prairie so dramatically? What material used to be mined in the Devil's Backbone area? What birds can be spotted at Devil's Backbone? In 2018, Larimer County will be installing new interpretive signs at Devil's Backbone Open Space about the geology, history and ecology of this popular recreation area. The overall theme of the interpretive signs is time: from the forces that shape the earth over millennia, to the impact humans have on a landscape in a person's lifetime, to the migration birds make over a year.

During the spring, summer and fall, Larimer County educators host Tiny Trekkers programs for 2- to 5-year-olds and their parents. These programs connect little ones to nature through crafts, stories, games and fun facts. Usually held monthly, they are highly popular and often fill, so starting this spring, Tiny Trekkers will be held twice a month on the second and fourth Tuesday. Programs will be held at Devil's Backbone Open Space near Loveland and River Bluffs Open Space between Timnath and Windsor. To sign up for Tiny Trekkers, visit offer.larimer.org.



COLLABORATION

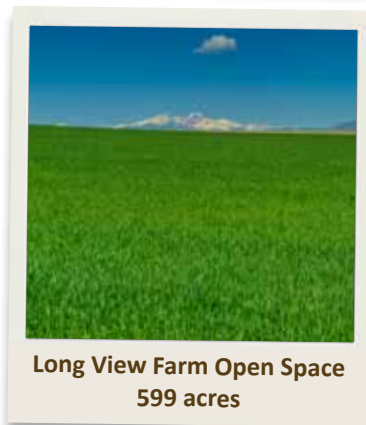
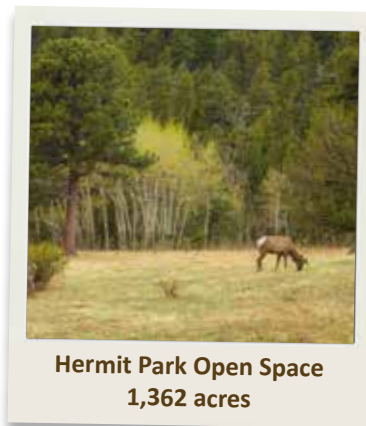
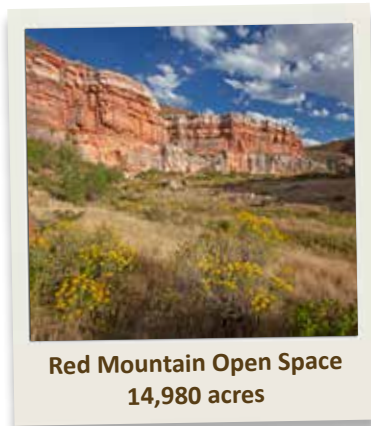
50,000

Acres Conserved
in Larimer County

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO (GOCO)

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources has achieved the 50,000-acre milestone for land conservation in the county thanks, in a large part, to the support of its partners. A significant partner for Larimer County over the years has been Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). Over more than two decades, GOCO has awarded Larimer County \$25.2 million in grant funds to help the County conserve land, enhance trailheads and facilities, build trails and connect people to nature, among other impacts. On behalf of the citizens of Larimer County, the department thanks GOCO for its ongoing support of conservation and recreation. Thank you!

GOCO has awarded significant grant funds to the department, allowing it to leverage other revenue sources many times over. Pictured below are a few examples of the lands GOCO has helped the department to conserve:



GOCO funds were used to conserve all or a portion of the acres listed for each property.



The Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund was created in 1992 when voters approved Amendment Article XXVII to the Colorado Constitution. It directs a portion of Colorado Lottery profits to GOCO for projects that preserve, protect and enhance the state's wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage, and created a board of trustees to govern distribution. Learn more about GOCO at www.goco.org.

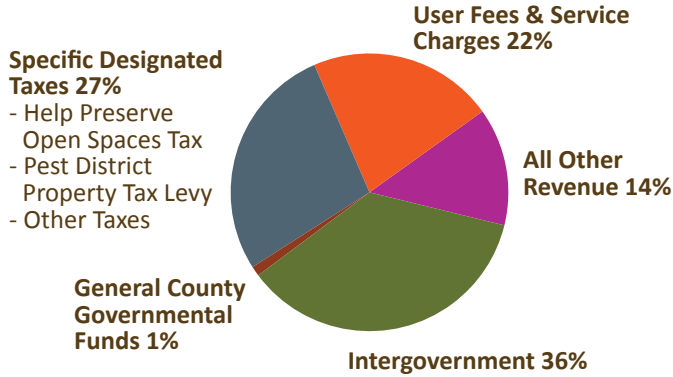


FINANCIALS

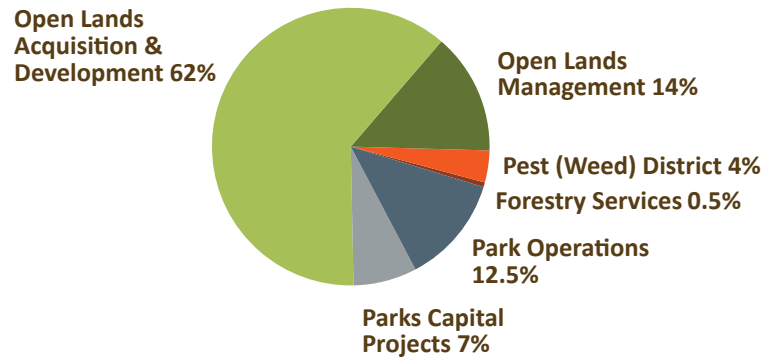
DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES SUMMARY OF FINANCES

Revenues for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources are realized from a number of sources and totaled \$24.5 million in 2017. Expenses for 2017 were \$25 million, including a number of one-time capital development projects on County parks and open spaces.

2017 REVENUES



2017 EXPENSES



*These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2018.

HELP PRESERVE OPEN SPACES TAX REVENUES

Revenue from the 1/4-cent Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax is shared among Larimer County and the eight municipalities in the county. The tax was extended in 2014 and will sunset in 2043. It is not imposed on food or prescription drugs. The total revenue collected to date is more than \$211 million.

Distributions to municipalities are based upon the highest yield of either population or sales tax generation. This revenue sharing agreement ensures that residents throughout Larimer County receive benefits from the Help Preserve Open Spaces tax.

*These figures are not audited. Audit will be completed in mid-2018. Figures in this chart have been rounded where appropriate.

	Larimer Co.	Berthoud	Estes Park	Fort Collins	Johnstown	Loveland	Timnath	Wellington	Windsor
1996	2,259,975	71,154	161,905	2,107,473	—	847,210	4,221	29,848	—
1997	2,485,421	80,969	178,198	2,319,562	—	932,139	4,646	32,520	—
1998	2,707,553	87,574	193,453	2,487,606	—	1,003,872	5,025	40,557	—
1999	3,067,810	101,539	224,779	2,850,066	—	1,146,823	5,732	47,494	—
2000	3,294,869	110,862	222,608	3,109,001	—	1,234,060	5,742	53,444	—
2001	3,565,146	122,889	229,886	3,323,372	—	1,321,205	5,887	64,589	—
2002	3,527,084	124,139	218,802	3,235,748	—	1,304,378	5,599	67,642	—
2003	3,532,580	123,913	218,445	3,205,119	—	1,314,655	7,083	66,730	—
2004	3,750,211	126,810	234,908	3,374,671	9,457	1,405,098	11,480	75,185	17,416
2005	3,811,306	127,480	239,502	3,417,517	8,932	1,432,898	11,684	79,698	20,115
2006	4,033,795	136,930	250,110	3,599,786	11,965	1,506,477	13,196	77,782	13,379
2007	4,152,187	129,513	252,524	3,529,570	34,285	1,554,153	10,563	122,196	54,760
2008	3,956,426	120,359	240,167	3,189,107	38,772	1,470,884	9,121	122,125	55,744
2009	3,614,183	109,178	224,318	2,824,574	45,847	1,410,859	7,103	114,630	49,957
2010	3,920,058	118,288	244,384	3,058,106	55,501	1,558,011	6,746	123,466	59,200
2011	4,114,913	120,393	265,441	3,227,847	62,688	1,592,744	48,317	129,817	71,406
2012	4,485,954	124,545	288,754	3,554,623	75,886	1,740,460	73,910	155,336	113,641
2013	4,777,403	133,751	309,913	3,814,068	74,128	1,904,909	81,646	167,553	124,097
2014	5,388,708	151,014	347,758	4,289,731	82,150	2,229,709	94,508	190,388	141,199
2015	5,718,927	160,117	366,203	4,555,811	88,500	2,368,947	99,959	202,066	151,192
2016	6,021,598	174,706	358,252	4,782,068	105,249	2,500,949	130,089	222,412	173,375
2017	6,184,774	174,719	397,768	5,018,453	112,006	2,598,829	214,066	239,172	203,307
Total	88,370,881	2,730,842	5,668,078	74,873,879	805,366	34,379,269	856,323	2,424,650	1,248,789
% Total	40.84%	1.15%	2.63%	33.14%	.74%	17.16%	1.41%	1.58%	1.34%

**Larimer County Department of
Natural Resources**

1800 S. County Road 31
Loveland, CO 80537

(970) 619-4570

larimer.org/naturalresources

