



PLAN JEFFCO UPDATE

DECEMBER 2021

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Designing Firestrong Parks

Timeline

2017: State Fire Assistance Wildland Urban Interface Grant awarded to Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) and Denver Mountain Parks (DMP). JCOS received \$65,000 for 50 acres; DMP received \$130,000 for 100 acres.

2018: Work on Forest inventories and project layout

Fall 2018: Tree removal begins

Winter 2020: Project completed

Responsibilities: JCOS treated 21 acres of lodgepole patch-cuts with 43 acres of ponderosa pine; DMP treated 70 acres at Flying J Ranch Park and 30 near West Jefferson Middle School.

Source: www.jeffco.us/3343

By Vicky Gits

Late last year, Denver Mountain Parks and Jeffco Open Space completed a comprehensive fire-conscious makeover of the 418-acre Flying J Ranch Open Space Park near Conifer.

Most of Flying J is part of Jeffco Open Space; the rest or about 70 acres, is part of Denver Mountain Parks.

It is a beautiful park, popular with dogwalkers and families, with 5 miles of trails and some picnic pavilions, but it serves a purpose other than purely recreational.

It represents the ramping up of Jeffco Open Space efforts to protect the

foothills community by creating a potentially life-saving barrier to rampant wildfire.

Mountain-area residents are feeling the threat more than ever, since the July 13, 2020, outbreak on Elephant Butte, in Denver Mountain Parks, next to Jeffco's popular Alderfer Three Sisters Park.

This was a dangerous fire that seriously threatened the town of Evergreen two miles away and was halted after scorching 54 acres by a lucky, flash rainstorm.

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Designing Firestrong Parks continued

Jeffco has been working on various forest management projects in Flying J Ranch Open Space since 2000.

Creating continuous fuel breaks

The work gained momentum in 2017 when together Jeffco Open Space Parks and Denver Mountain Parks won a joint \$195,000 grant from the State Forest Service to reduce fire risk, improve wildlife habitat and enhance forest health on a grander scale.

DMP received \$130,000 for 100 acres, and Jeffco received \$65,000 to treat 50 acres. Visitors were warned to expect tree removal and the creation of continuous fuel breaks, according to a March 2020 information sheet.

Tree processing began October 2018 and was completed by winter 2020. More than 570 cords of firewood were donated to two public firewood sales. Jeffco donated about 20 cut and split cords to a church for distribution to lower income and mostly elderly Conifer residents. Elk Creek Fire Department delivered 100 log rounds to Marshdale Elementary School to be used for outdoor classes.

Jeffco treated 63 acres total, of which 21.1 acres were lodgepole patch-cuts and 43 acres were ponderosa pine treatments. DMP treated about 70 acres at the park and about 30 acres at other property across Highway 73 next to West Jefferson Middle School.

Today the surrounding community benefits from having a healthier forest and a massive fuel break that will force a fire to burn slowly closer to the ground instead of racing through flaming treetops.

Unexpected outcome

While the benefits of reducing fire risk are obvious, it's no secret that some who have seen the aftermath of the Flying J fire-prevention program, are not happy with the aesthetics of the results.

They object to the areas where huge swaths of mostly lodgepoles were removed in total, leaving nothing but a blanket of chewed-up branches and twigs. Some previously densely forested hills are now completely barren.

Most of the land that was effectively stripped of vegetation belongs to Denver Mountain Parks. This land contained dense stands of lodgepoles between 50 and 120 years old and partly infested with ips beetles. (For more information on the ips beetle go to <https://csfs.colostate.edu/forest-management/common-forest-insects-diseases/ips-beetle/>)

Foresters for both park systems defended the treatment.

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Designing Firestrong Parks continued

“Lodgepole easily carries a crown fire,” said Andrew Perri, program manager for forestry and natural resources for Denver Mountain Parks.

“That stand was too dense and too unhealthy. It was too much of a fire danger,” Perri said. Perri said at least 30 acres was lodgepole and some was mixed conifer (ponderosa pine and Douglas fir.)

“We left the older, beautiful ponderosa pine. We kept as many as we could or about 90 percent.” Ponderosas have thicker bark and are more resistant to fire. Workers also raked in grass seed.

The grant award had a lot to do with the park's location. “When you fill out an application, it asks how many homes are affected. It has helped maybe a thousand homes,” Perri said. “That's why we teamed up with Jefferson County Open Space. The bigger the project, the better chance we have of being successful.”

Imitating nature

The main goal of the forest treatment is to mimic the effect of naturally occurring wildfire, explained Steve Murdock, natural resources team lead with Jefferson County Open Space.

“Fire becomes bad when you have decades of fire suppression and fuels build up. Fires at low intensity keep the forest healthy. If fuel

builds up and trees get crowded, it weakens all the trees,” Murdock said.

About 150 years ago, flying J Ranch Park was a homestead and a prime source of lumber. All the trees were probably systematically harvested for income, Murdock said .

Ultimately, the re-growth became the subject of concern because of the risk to the populations of Conifer and Evergreen. Flying J Ranch was identified as a top priority by the State Forest Service.

“If you drive around at night you can see all the lights across the hillsides. You can see how densely packed the houses are.” Murdock said.

As for the lodgepoles, they tend to grow close together. A natural fire would burn down the whole stand, Murdock said. “In a fire the entire lodgepole forest would burn, which is why we cut them all down,” Murdock said.

“We (partially) removed the forest but long term, we created an opening so fire can stop and be controllable. The alternative is to wait for the fire to come and burn it all down. We simulate the natural areas. We let the trees come back on their own.”

“People were upset. They said the forest always looked like this [meaning untreated] and you ruined it. But it was an unhealthy forest. In the next generation, it will be healthy again.”

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Designing Firestrong Parks continued

“In three years the area that was cut will be a meadow. After explaining what we did and how we did it, people are generally usually OK. That's not what they were expecting. They thought we would thin out a few trees,” Murdock said.

Place to make a stand

Jacob Ware, chief of the Elk Creek Fire Department, endorsed the tree extractions in Flying J Ranch. “Much of the forest is overgrown, making it susceptible to extreme wildfire behavior and disease.

“The work...provides areas of opportunity to suppress the fire. If no work was done and given the right fire environment, suppression within the park and surrounding areas could have been extremely difficult.”

Future Projects

Foresters are looking forward to tackling other areas in the foothills. Jefferson County is updating the forest health plan using “cutting-edge” modeling software, said Steve Murdock of the JCOS natural resources team. The results will determine how priorities are set and should be available in early 2022.

Open Space has \$250,000 in the budget for the next five years to devote to forest management. The goal is 1,000 treated acres by the end of 2025. A 135-acre fuel break along Buffalo Park Road and Evergreen Heights in Alderfer/Three Sisters Park concluded in November of this year.

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Designing Firestrong Parks continued

Next are 37 acres at Myer Ranch Open Space Park in early 2022. Here foresters will take out the lodgepole and leave the intermingled aspen, which is more resistant to fire and holds more moisture. Then it will be back to Alderfer Three Sisters to clean extraneous fuel out of 240 acres of mostly ponderosa north of the East trailhead, north of Buffalo Park Road. Murdock described this as a ponderosa pine restoration, not a fuel break.

Denver Mountain Parks will be doing more work on Bell Park and along Little Creek Road where dwarf mistletoe vine and pine beetle have infested trees. “Prime for stopping devastating wildfire close to

downtown Evergreen,” Perri said.

One thing Murdock has noticed through this process is that people are definitely more engaged than ever before. Safety is becoming more of a priority. People are thinking that fewer trees might be a good thing. “They want to know when are we going to treat the area around their house.”

Comment by John Litz

The U.S. Forest Service did a similar treatment of a lodgepole forest southwest of Nederland about four years ago. They were able to burn the slash and today, the resulting meadows are beautiful.



Beaver Ranch Park

By John Litz

As with many of the Jeffco Open Space parks, Beaver Ranch Park has an interesting history. The Open Space park and much of the surrounding area were ranched by the Kennedy family. In 1938 the family donated the 446-acre parcel to the Grace Community Church as a site for a summer camp. In the 1930s, 40s and 50s, many denominations or individual churches maintained camps in the foothills. In the 1960s, the Church stopped operating the camp and a number of Kiwanis clubs in the Denver area became the camp operators.

At that time the camp consisted of six cabins, a small lodge, a large lodge, and the caretaker's house. The Kiwanis did not have an official organization to operate the camp, but individual clubs took responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the various facilities. The Applewood Kiwanis Club had responsibility for Cabin #1, which the author repainted and repaired four times in the 1970s and 80s. The camp was rented to other organizations and the Kiwanis also had some camp sessions with the clubs sponsoring campers. When the Kiwanis decided to stop operating the camp, as it was too much of a task for the organization, the church sold it to the YMCA.

It did not take too long for the YMCA to decide that the camp was a poor

investment and they looked at getting it zoned for a subdivision and development. Throughout the previous period the large lodge was used by local groups for dinners and meetings. Many in the Conifer area did not want to lose the facility to a housing development, although the Conifer area three times had voted down proposals to form or join a recreation district. The interested groups lobbied Jeffco Open Space to acquire the property. Open Space leased the property for one year while arrangements were made to organize the Beaver Ranch Community, Inc. (BRCI) as a 501(c)3 non-profit to operate and manage the park. Purchase of the park from the YMCA was finalized in 2001.

The park's mission is “to provide a public resource of public lands, waters, and facilities for recreation, culture, civic, and education benefit of the Conifer Community, Jefferson County, and all visitors.” Since the previous operations had shown that rental income would not be sufficient to provide adequate funds for operation, BRCI contracted with two concessionaires to install and operate a zip line and a disc golf course. With these additions the revenue, plus private donations, and volunteer labor still was not enough to make the necessary repairs and improvements. In 2010, 2013, and 2014 BRCI requested joint venture funds from Open Space's share of the Jeffco Conservation Trust Funds. These allowed completion of improvements to the small

Beaver Ranch Park, Continued

lodge (Tipi Lodge), the larger lodge (Main Lodge), and the caretaker's house.

In about 2015, Open Space staff recognized that the BCRI could not handle care and maintenance of the entire 446-acre property and applied for a grant for a master plan to cover both development and management. This master plan was completed in 2017 and essentially separates the park into active recreation areas which will be managed by

BCRI, and passive, public areas to be managed by Open Space.

Figure 1 is a map of the park as it was in 2017. Figure 2 is a map assuming all of the recommendations are completed. The brown shaded areas are those where BCRI provides management and the green areas are managed by Open Space.



Figure 1

Beaver Ranch Park, Continued



Figure 2

The recommendations are slowly being implemented. In the last two years, the 1/3-acre property between the park and Black Hawk Drive was acquired by the Jeffco Open Space Foundation and donated to JCOS. This provided legal access to the south end of the park. The cabins have been removed, allowing only for tent camping. The Trails Team has completed over four miles of new trail this summer and fall.



Beaver Ranch Park, Continued



Pine Elfin, pictured below, is a little over a mile loop on the far south end of the park. It has quickly become a favorite dog walking spot for the neighbors and the Trails Team have received nothing but glowing feedback from visitors.

Trail photos by Kaleb Anzick



OSAC Notes - OSAC Notes

September 9, 2021

Study Session canceled

Regular meeting

Approved an easement for a resident who lives adjacent to the Coal Creek Canyon property along Blum Trail to allow him legal access to his property.

South Table Land Exchange

Since taking ownership of the first parcel of South Table Mountain in the 1990s, JCOS has struggled to locate a regional/main trailhead for its many visitors, resulting in several designated and undesignated access points. In 2019, DOE approached JCOS about a public/private partnership to use a portion of Pleasant View Community Park for renewable energy purposes located outside of its secure campus, to be used by its partners. JCOS identified an opportunity to place a much-needed main trailhead at a site accessible from Denver West Parkway.

The land exchange conveys approximately 164 acres on South Table Mountain Park currently owned by DOE to JCOS. JCOS holds a conservation easement on much of this property and the exchange would convey the remaining fee interest to further protect it as open space. Additionally, DOE will convey a 1.76-acre trail easement to JCOS to enable additional trail connections on South Table Mountain Park, and a 0.79-acre property on the corner of South Golden Road and Research Road that JCOS will sell and use the proceeds for Pleasant View Community Park. In exchange, JCOS will convey 9.27 acres located on the northwest corner of Pleasant View Community Park to DOE. DOE would then transfer this property to the State of Colorado (State) to be used for future renewable energy uses.

Pleasant View Community Park is currently leased to Pleasant View Metro District (PVMD) and the lease will be amended to exclude the 9.27 acres being exchanged. To compensate PVMD and the Pleasant

View community for the reduction of park acreage, JCOS will enter an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with PVMD that will provide \$3,557,500 for improvements to the remaining parkland, including lighted synthetic turf fields, a 10-12' wide concrete regional trail connection, and other amenities identified in the Revised Master Plan for the Park

The map on the next page shows the parcels being exchanged.

October 7, 2021

Study Session cancelled

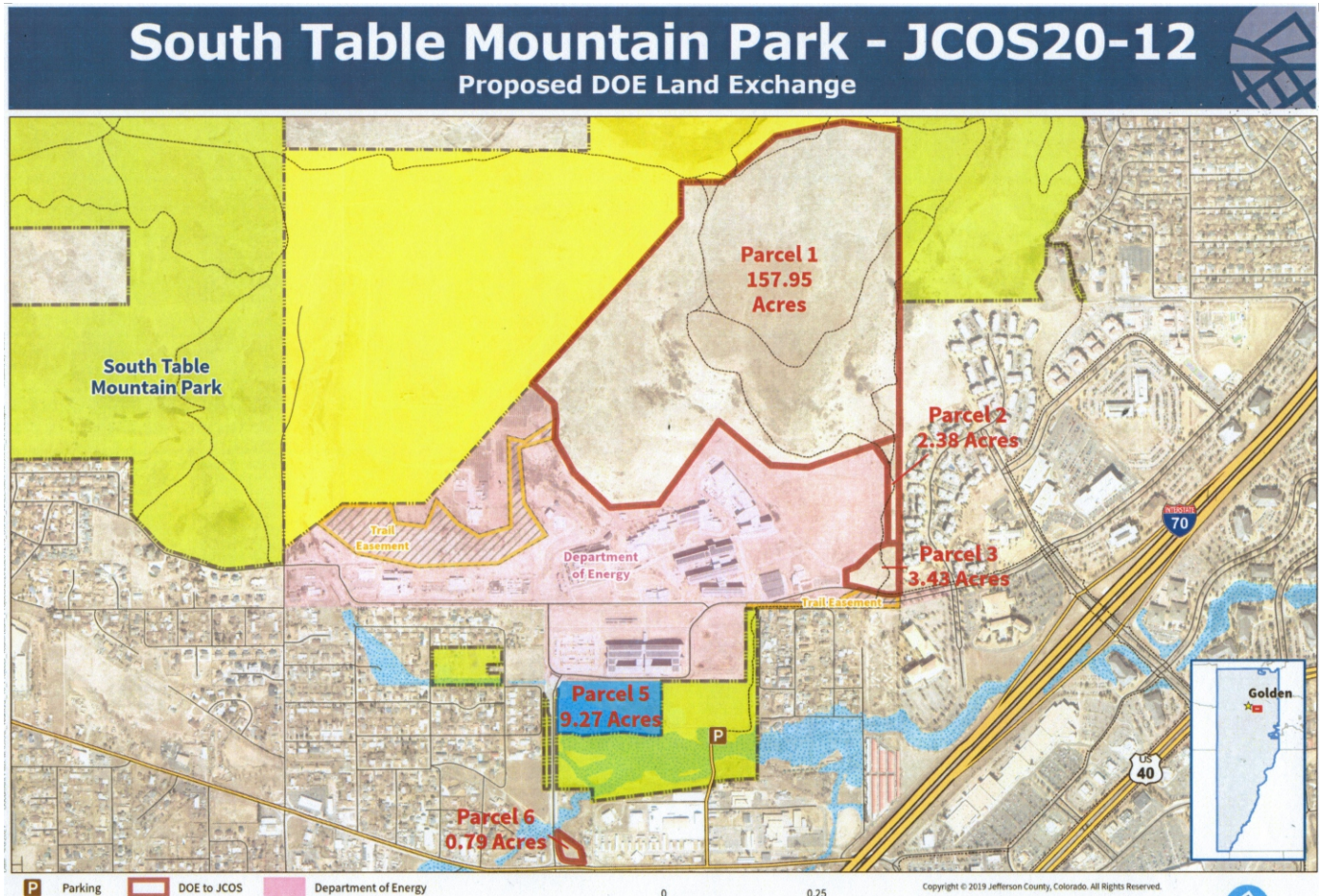
Regular session

School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP)
Park Ranger and SWAP Lead, Justin Doty, provided an overview of the program including who it serves and how it is benefitting JCOS, students, and park visitors.

The SWAP program is a partnership with Jeffco Public Schools and JCOS. The program provides vocational employment opportunities and training for Jeffco High School students with behavioral, physical, or emotional barriers to employment. The program provides supervision, job coaches, and an hourly wage for the students. JCOS provides projects and role models for meaningful employment in the outdoors.

The Park Services, Rangers, and Trails Teams have been working with the SWAP team since 2016 and have realized over 8,300 hours of labor through the program. This inclusive program provides career growth opportunities for students and for JCOS staff who help organize and lead work projects in our parks.

OSAC Notes - OSAC Notes, continued



Equitable Access & Trail Usability Update

Matt Martinez, Volunteer Services Specialist, presented an overview of the recent work that is being completed toward equitable access & trail usability within Jeffco Open Space parks.

The Trails Team and Matt Martinez, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team representative, have been working with Colin Heferen, Project Manager for National Parks Service, and Quinn Brett, Program Analyst, to address equitable access and trail usability at some JCOS parks. Quinn is also working on the concept of usability which consists of trails that do not meet “accessibility” requirements but could be accessible utilizing newly developed mobility devices. This program is evaluating trail accessibility for not only mobility-assisted device visitors, but also visitors who may be differently abled, such as prosthetics

or elderly walkers. City of Boulder Parks has put together a pamphlet that describes their alternately-abled trails, as a model to follow.

As part of achieving the goals set by the Conservation Greenprint, JCOS is hoping to have three miles of trail with improved usability by 2022. The plans are to complete a 6,000-foot loop in Elk Meadow in October and add 10,000 feet to it on National Trails Day in 2022.

Randall Park

Approved a \$150,000 share of the purchase of a house and lot that are an inholding in Randall Park at 41st and Gray St in Wheat Ridge.

November 4, 2021

Meeting cancelled



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Jefferson County Citizens for
Planned Growth with Open Space

PLAN JEFFCO NEWSLETTER

Thanks to the PLAN Jeffco members who voted to confirm the current Board of Directors. Thanks also to those who brought their dues up to date.

We currently have eleven members on the Board and have openings for four more. We currently are meeting on the fourth Thursday of the month in a hybrid mode. If you are interested email "contactus@planjeffco.org."

Are you interested in joining? Our dues are \$35 per year. You can join on the website - "planjeffco.org" or by mailing a check to:

PLAN Jeffco
11010 W 29th Ave
Lakewood, CO 80215

