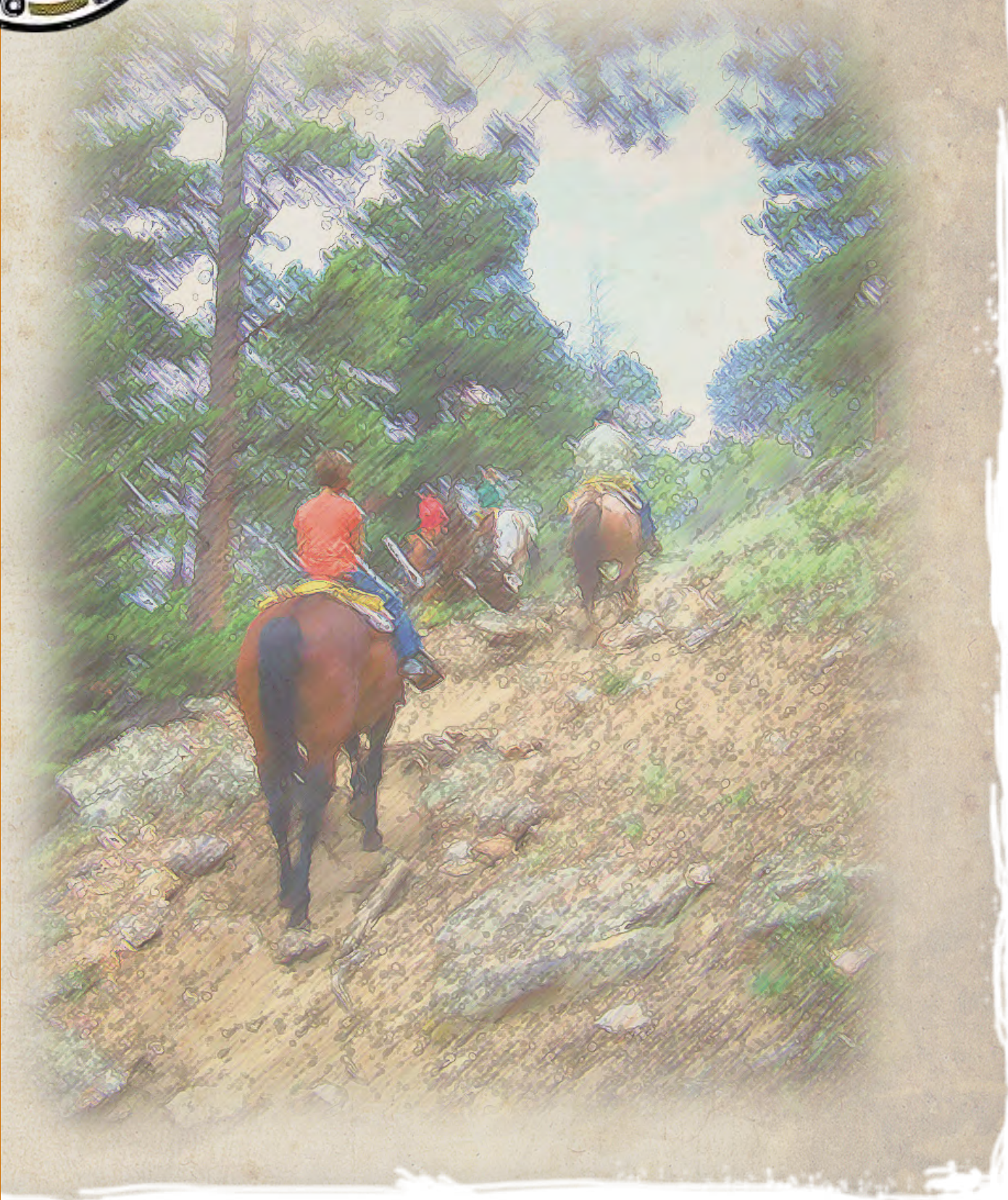




# Costilla County

Trails, Recreation, & Open Space Plan  
September 2012





**Costilla County:  
Trails, Recreation, & Open Space Plan**

*Prepared For:*

**Costilla County, Colorado**

*Written and Prepared By:*

**Colorado Open Lands**

**Costilla County**

**National Park Service**

*Document Design:*

**Root House Studio**

**September, 2012**

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## Chapter I:

# Introduction

## Introduction



*Adobe and Blanca Peak*

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The partnership between the National Park Service, Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, Southwest Conservation Corps, Costilla County Public Health Agency and Costilla County has created the opportunity for state and federal agencies, community organizations, and county residents to meet, share data, provide input, and most importantly develop an understanding for the need for this project. The county would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of partners who helped with this important project. Without their support, the county would not have recognized opportunities to develop, connect, and promote valuable natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources.

### ***GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO (GOCO)***

GOCO dedicates a portion of state lottery proceeds to projects that preserve, protect, and enhance Colorado's wildlife, parks, rivers, trails, and open spaces. Since it began awarding grants in 1994, GOCO has awarded nearly \$690 million for more than 3,000 projects throughout the state. The county received a grant from GOCO to complete this planning document. GOCO provided financial assistance to help the county organize monthly stakeholder meetings and two community events, as well as the costs for production and printing costs for the document. A separate GOCO grant received by the county in July 2011, provided funding to improve a 1-mile trail segment within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision Greenbelt Area, one of the few multi-use trails within the county's open space. Without funding support from GOCO, the county would not have been able to coordinate the planning efforts with partners listed or completed a much needed trail maintenance project.

### ***NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RIVERS, TRAILS, AND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM***

Since 1916, the American people have entrusted the National Park Service with the care of their national parks. With the help of volunteers and park partners, they proudly safeguard nearly 400 places and share their stories with more than 275 million visitors every year. But their work doesn't stop there. They have developed the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. RTCA supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects. RTCA staff provides technical assistance to communities so they can conserve rivers,

preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. The RTCA Program provided assistance with planning and organizing stakeholder meetings and community events, advising county officials and administrators on specific strategies for stakeholder identification and outreach efforts, designing public surveys, concept plans and maps, drafting and reviewing the document and facilitating conversations between key stakeholders. The expertise and organization of Community Planners and Outdoor Recreation Planners, and commitment to a community-driven planning process allowed the project to fully engage county residents and visitors.

### ***COSTILLA COUNTY***

Bounded to the west by the Rio Grande River, originally settled as part of a Mexican land grant and claiming Colorado's oldest town, Costilla County possesses a unique natural and cultural heritage. The goal of the county in developing this comprehensive plan is to identify and protect those resources while at the same time linking opportunities for tourist recreation with community priorities for recreation, particularly health and youth involvement. Costilla County helped to develop and guide the overall planning process, particularly stakeholder identification, outreach, and engagement, development of public surveys, generating maps and the drafting of the document. Costilla County residents provided valuable input on their concerns, county resources they value and proposed projects and recommendations to expand existing opportunities or create new opportunities. Costilla County youth provided a fresh perspective on how to value county resources, how to reach the county's younger residents, and projects and events that would attract Costilla County youth to enjoy the county's natural and cultural resources.

Costilla County would like to thank community members for finding time to attend monthly meetings and providing valuable input for this important process.

### ***COLORADO OPEN LANDS***

Colorado Open Lands (COL) is a state-wide land trust that focuses on voluntary land and water protection, including conservation of agricultural lands and water rights, wildlife habitat, and scenic areas. Colorado Open Lands was an active partner in this project and assisted the County to secure funds for the planning process, provided GIS data and capacity, shared knowledge on conservation easements and resource protection, and assisted with drafting and reviewing the plan. Colorado Open Lands is committed to working with private landowners and other organizations to help advance the goals of the plan.



### ***RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS LAND TRUST (RiGHT)***

The mission of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) is to conserve the land, water, and way of life in Colorado's San Luis Valley. RiGHT protects working ranches and farms, water resources, wildlife habitat, and scenic landscapes. The project benefited from a RiGHT representative providing staff time and resources for sharing data and knowledge on protecting working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic views. The organization is also committed to pursuing conservation projects that the plan identifies. Their support and insight was a great asset to the goals and vision of the development of the plan.

### ***SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION CORPS (SCC)***

The Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) engages and trains a diverse group of young women and men and completes conservation projects for the public benefit. The county has had a long standing relationship with SCC who has provided youth corps to assist the county with community conservation projects. With funding assistance from a GOCO grant received in July 2011, crew members and participants from the Southwest Conservation Corps Los Valles District completed a 1-mile trail restoration

project within the Sangre de Cristo Subdivision Greenbelt Area in October 2011. Their knowledge of trail construction and maintenance and their commitment to using outdoor resources as teaching tools about conservation for young adults is greatly appreciated.

### ***THE COSTILLA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY***

The Costilla County Public Health Agency is an active partner in this project and worked to identify potential trails and recreation projects and priorities from a health access and prevention perspective. The Public Health Agency provided staff time to the planning process and meeting space for monthly stakeholder meetings. Their perspective was invaluable to the process and understanding of the need for the plan.

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### **PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT**

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Costilla County is unique in that although the county is 39% forested and has substantial mountainous terrain, the county is 99% private land. This has created a tremendous lack of outdoor recreational resources and a lack of publicly accessible trails and open space.



*Culebra Creek*

The county has long recognized the need to comprehensively and strategically address these issues but prior to this planning effort this had yet to be completed. Prior planning efforts within the county, such as the 1999 Costilla County Comprehensive Plan (a policy tool for guiding decisions concerning land use and future growth), focused on creating policies for capital improvements, land use regulation, addressing growth and development issues, outlining recreational opportunities, and gauging general attitudes of the quality of life in Costilla County. Though the document developed policies and directives related to improving accessible recreational opportunities, such as directives that “protect the integrity of the historic district in San Luis”, “restore Rito Seco through San Luis through trail loop and river front revitalization”, or “provide recreational opportunities for all residents and visitors to diversify the economic base”, the document did not elaborate on projects and county priorities to implement these policies.

However, the county did successfully apply to Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) in 2004 to acquire the 1,225-acre Carpenter Ranch to be used as a county open space property. The acquisition motivated the county to pursue avenues for addressing more issues after they were advised that their chances for funding open space and trails projects would increase if a planning document to address Trails, Recreation and Open Space was developed.

The need still remains for a planning document that identifies important natural resources, cultural heritage sites, and outdoor recreation opportunities. A document that addresses lack of public land, trails and recreational resources while also increasing public and visitor enjoyment of natural and cultural resources. In addition, a document is needed to identify opportunities for youth to experience their natural environment and address the health and fitness needs of different segments of the county’s population, from youth to seniors as well as other groups that may be at risk for obesity and diabetes.

In January 2011, the County seized the opportunity and began developing a comprehensive plan that addresses the above mentioned needs by engaging county residents and partners in developing, connecting, and promoting county resources. Currently, the county has resources available that were not available previously including the recently designated Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, planning and technical assistance from the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, commitment from both statewide and local conservation organizations (Colorado Open Lands and the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust), AND a grant from Great Outdoors Colorado. The county is fortunate to have



*Community knowledge of resources and potential trail connections was important to the master planning process*

a great opportunity to bring the necessary pieces together to complete the plan and actively pursue the projects it identifies.

The Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan was developed through a collaborative process, utilizing planning and technical assistance from the National Park Service, funding from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), support from community members and input from county residents.

The community has responded to public surveys on four separate occasions to address their concerns, identify county resources they value and propose project ideas and recommendations to expand existing opportunities or create new opportunities. Planning efforts have summarized priority projects proposed by the community and identified recommendations for increasing access to outdoor recreational resources, improving recreational amenities, providing a variety of recreational opportunities, and increasing protection of scenic viewsheds, agricultural lands, heritage, wildlife habitat, and water resources.

**As a result, the Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan identifies valuable projects that:**

- Connect community recreation areas and cultural sites with multi-use trails;
- Improve existing recreational resources; and
- Identify priorities for conservation easements and fee acquisition that provide view sheds along current and future trails alignments or provide opportunities for trail easements or public opportunities.

# Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

## Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt: Potential Trail Improvements Map



- Contour Line (100 ft)
- State Highway
- Canals and Ditches
- County and Local Roads
- Rivers and Streams
- 4WD Trail

The Master Plan includes a series of maps for a proposed county-wide trail system within county-owned open spaces along with recommendations for future trail extensions and connections to other county resources. These recommendations also include activities, partnerships and funding to increase access and knowledge of these trails, design standards, implementation of trail projects, and recommendations for trail maintenance.

The plan also includes recommendations for park improvements for 7 parks located within the county as well as recommendations for maintenance, funding and partnerships for completing these improvements. Another major component of the master plan is a series of maps that outline proposals for open space conservation and recommendations for protection including key partnerships and funding sources to implement the recommendations. Among the many other details included in this comprehensive document is an inventory of county resources, a project planning spreadsheet, and benefits of trail systems and open space conservation.

Overall, this comprehensive document outlines valuable projects while also identifying partnerships and funding

sources to implement these projects so the community can begin to enjoy healthy recreational activities and protect valuable resources in their county. Utilizing a community-driven planning process to identify projects and propose recommendations ensures that the project will be more competitive in getting grants to make those projects a reality.

Once the plan is adopted, the County and partners will be better positioned to use their collective resources to implement specific projects. Specifically, the County will utilize this document in their annual budget development to allocate funding for identified projects with an opportunity to move forward.

Although advisory in nature, the plan may be the basis for regulatory measures inclusive of project review recommendations. The plan also serves as the foundation for intergovernmental agreements, capital improvement programming, and detailed studies and programs coordinated by public jurisdictions within Costilla County. The Plan should be consulted by Planning and Zoning Department staff, the Planning Commission, and the Board of County Commissioners. Our partners in private conservation, Colorado Open Lands and Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, will utilize this plan to direct their outreach efforts and internal project prioritization as well as to act on opportunities for public access on private lands.

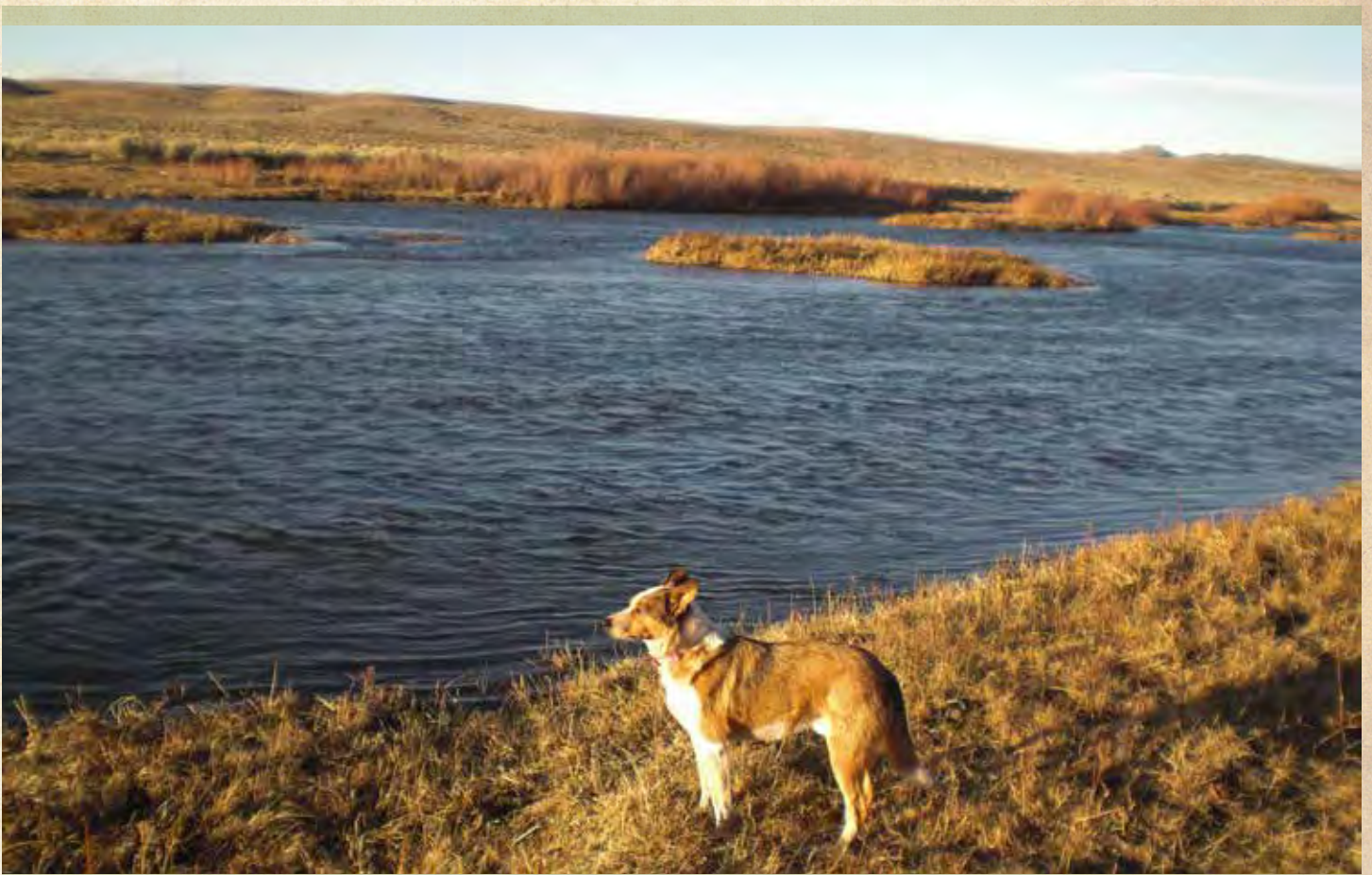
The Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan is the result of hard work from federal, state, and local organizations as well as thoughtful suggestions from county residents. We hope you find this document useful and inspiring to get out into your community and enjoy the outdoors and protect significant resources.



*Fishing the beaver ponds in Batenburg Meadows (© Sarah Parmar)*

## Chapter 2:

# Vision and Goals



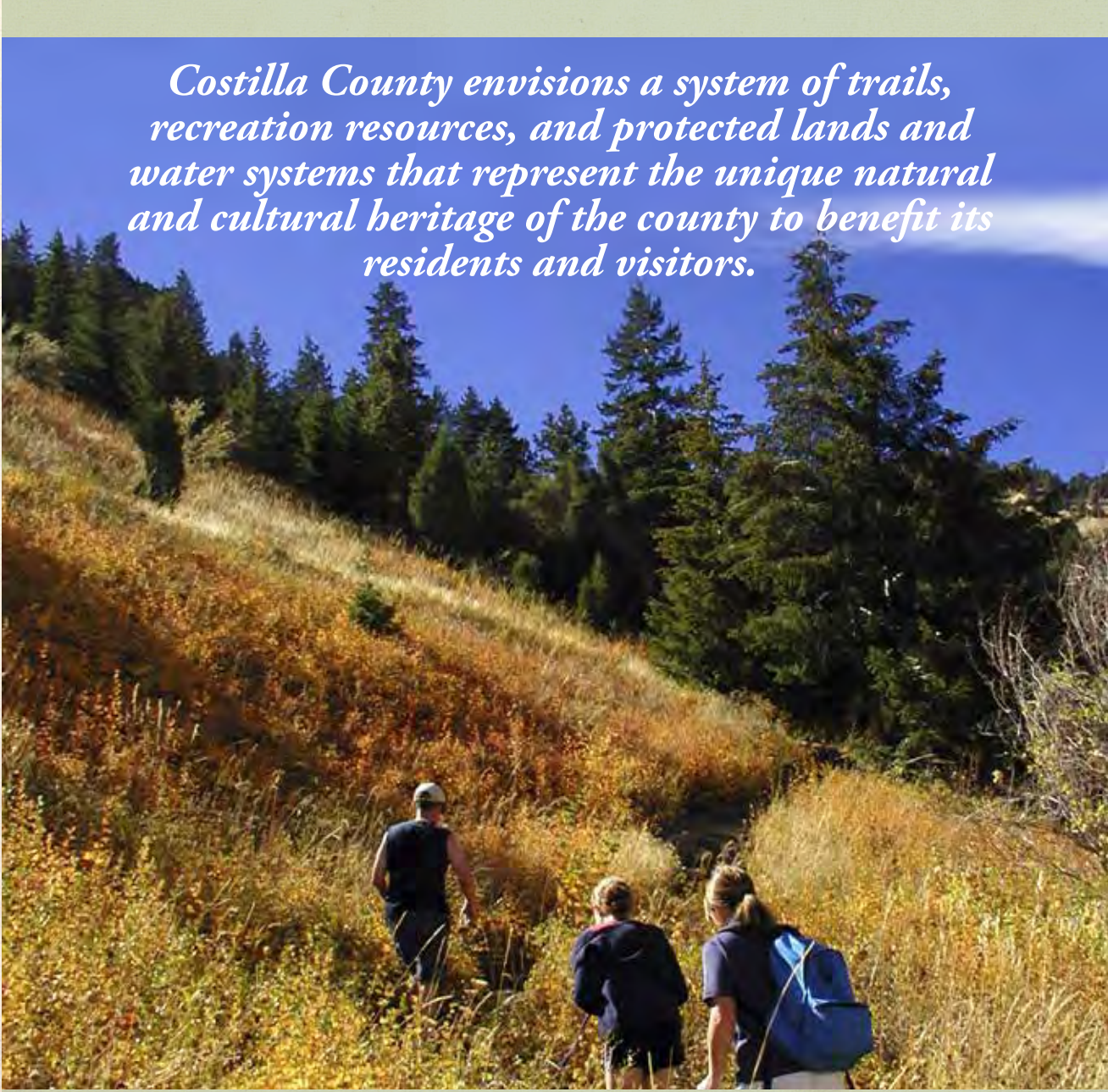
*Rio Grande Greenbelt*

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## THE COSTILLA COUNTY VISION

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The vision and set of goals were developed through a collective process integrating feedback from stakeholders representing a variety of community organizations. The goal of the Master Plan is to enhance outdoor experiences, promote healthy and active lifestyles and protect the unique qualities of Costilla County. This will be accomplished with the creation of a system of trails, recreational spaces and opportunities, and conserving strategic parcels of land.



*Costilla County envisions a system of trails, recreation resources, and protected lands and water systems that represent the unique natural and cultural heritage of the county to benefit its residents and visitors.*

Un sistema de senderos, recursos recreativos, y tierra protegidas y sistemas de aguas que representan la herencia natural y cultural única del condado para los beneficios de residentes y visitantes.

# GOALS FOR THE COSTILLA COUNTY TRAILS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

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**A.** CREATE A SYSTEM OF TRAILS THAT ENHANCE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES AND CONNECTS EXISTING CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES USING MULTI-USE TRAILS AND WALKING PATHS TO SERVE COMMUNITY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

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**B.** CREATE RECREATIONAL SPACES AND PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC AREAS AND/OR PRIVATE LANDS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE DIFFERENT RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES.

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**C.** CONSERVE STRATEGIC PARCELS OF LAND THAT PROTECT VIEWSHEDS, UNIQUE NATURAL RESOURCES, TRAIL CORRIDORS, HISTORIC STRUCTURES, AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS AND ASSOCIATED WATER RIGHTS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT PLACES.

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*Autumn in the Culebra Range*





# Trails, Recreation

## Chapter 3:

# and Open Space Plan

## Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan : Benefits



*Trinchera Ranch Elk (© John Fiedler)*

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## CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE, HERITAGE, AND COMMUNITY

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When people connect with nature, the benefits can be very personal – a feeling of calm, a spiritual connection, a sense of renewal – however, another benefit of connecting to nature is that it can also connect us to community and to our heritage. When we have spaces where we can be outside together, whether it is to go for a walk with a friend or to have a family BBQ, we interact with people in a way that binds us.

Costilla County's unique heritage is linked to the history of the land. Ironically, this history created a county that is one of the least densely populated, but one in which there are few places for its residents to recreate because it is almost entirely comprised of private ownership. For many residents, time spent outdoors is usually associated with agriculture, whether it is a primary occupation, secondary occupation, or hunting, fishing, or barbecuing on the land of a friend or relative. This common experience connects residents with nature, heritage, and community.

Within Costilla County, it is critical to protect agricultural lands and wildlife habitat so that the residents continue to have the opportunity to work and recreate in these natural and working landscapes, but it is also important to identify other recreational wants and needs of residents so that there are even more opportunities for people to connect to heritage and community.

By protecting existing resources and expanding opportunities, we also ensure that future generations have these same abilities to connect. There is a growing concern that if future generations do not have a connection to nature, they may not have an innate desire to protect it and may not be adequately equipped to appreciate complex natural resource issues. The same argument may hold for cultural heritage – if a child does not learn about or appreciate their heritage what incentive do they have to maintain traditions? In Costilla County, natural and cultural heritage are intertwined; consequently, by protecting these resources now, we ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to enjoy and steward the unique heritage.

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## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

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Costilla County has a diversity of landforms from the Rio Grande River that forms the western border, to the Culebra



*Sanchez Reservoir, a State Wildlife Area*

Mountains on the eastern border. The natural environment is a unique system that faces the challenges of being 99% private land with little to no public lands. Increased accessibility to trails and availability of open space provides a significant opportunity to protect this environment for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

Protecting a community's natural environment reduces environmental impacts. Wetlands and riparian habitats filter contaminants in surface runoff which in return protect entire watersheds and drinking water sources. Trees and shrubs cleanse the air. Open space and trail corridors provide sanctuaries for trees and shrubs to grow.

Land designated as open space is permanently protected and can be characterized as land left in a primarily natural state containing significant natural, aesthetic, or cultural features that warrant protection. Trails are defined as linear open space which provides linkages between open space areas and public access to open space areas.

Unique natural environments along trails and within open spaces provide a community with great opportunities for education programs. Youth can learn about wildlife, habitat and geology in a safe environment. They provide adults and educators opportunities to teach local youth to be responsible for the environment and to be good neighbors.

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## ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

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Surveys by the Federal Highway Administration show that Americans are willing to walk as far as two miles to a destination and bicycle as far as five miles. However, only approximately 7% of the population in the state of Colorado, are choosing to walk, take public transportation, or select other means for commuting to work. In Costilla County, a 1999 County Comprehensive Plan indicated that the majority of county residents work within a relatively short distance from their homes. The county residents who don't live within short distances and have to commute, do so in a single occupant vehicle, and the approximately 20 percent of the workforce carpool while another five percent walk or bicycle to work. This is evidence that an alternative transportation system in the county connecting homes, workplaces, schools, parks, businesses, cultural sites and outdoor recreation could be an attractive alternative.

Alternative transportation routes such as safe bicycle routes and walking paths will provide residents with a safe option to complete routine daily tasks while also getting exercise. Establishing connections such as greenways would also contribute to alternative transportation links in rural areas of the county that are further away from towns and cities that have limited access to recreational resources. Residents, who live in more rural areas of the county, will be able to

walk or bike for recreational purposes without having to drive a long distance.

Other benefits to using alternative transportation routes include:

- Saving money. The cost of gas, maintenance on vehicles and insurance greatly decreases the less you use your vehicle and the more you walk and/or bike to destinations.
- Helping the Environment. Vehicle emissions are greatly reduced with fewer vehicles on the road. The less pollution created by vehicles and traffic, the more likelihood of clean air.
- Better physical and mental health. Increasing safe walking and bicycle routes to homes, workplaces, schools, businesses, and other attractive community resources increases a community's ability to get exercise. More exercise reduces the risk of diabetes, mental stresses, and heart-related diseases.

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## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Parks and open space are more than places to recreate and relate to nature. Strong, established parks and open space areas are focal points of communities. The enhancement and development of additional parks, trails and recreational



*Fort Garland Town Park*

activities provide a variety of benefits and fulfill a variety of needs within a community such as:

- Increase a variety of activities for different age groups and users.
- Connect to the community and each other with safe pedestrian access.
- Provide opportunities for passive and active recreation.
- Help reinforce a sense of community.
- Provide places for members of the community to gather and interact.
- Parks can be a symbol of vitality and character which enhance a community's image and quality of life.
- Parks and recreation programs offer a multitude of opportunities to engage in arts, music, and sports.

The community's highest priority is the need for more recreation opportunities close to home. Many people currently travel to nearby communities for their indoor and outdoor recreation needs. This is true for all ages and user groups.

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## IMPROVED HEALTH THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

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Parks, playgrounds, greenbelts, trails and community open spaces encourage people and their communities to be physical and mentally fit and healthy. People of all ages need physical activity to maintain fitness and health. There are many benefits to a community increasing access to indoor and outdoor recreational activities and programs.

- Physical activity increases strength, flexibility, and endurance. For example, childhood participation in organized fitness and sports programs helps attain higher bone density establishing a strong health base to combat osteoporosis later in life.
- Reduces the likelihood of disease. An estimated 66,000 U.S. deaths from coronary heart disease, colon cancer and diabetes could be prevented annually if one half of the sedentary people became active on a regular basis. Each additional mile walked or run by a sedentary person would give him or her an extra 21 minutes of life.
- Positive and enjoyable recreation experiences can decrease stress and enhance psychological well-being and improves mood. In Nationwide polls, 89% of

all Americans report that they often experience high levels of stress and 59% claimed that they feel great stress at least once a week. Leisure activities provide people with the opportunity to expel energy and emotion not being released in other aspects of their lives. Psychologists found that activities such as a walk in the woods gave a boost to the immune system that lasted two or three days.



A growing body of evidence also shows that nature plays a vital role in human health and well-being, and that parks and nature reserves play a significant role by providing access to nature for individuals. Contact with nature can be experienced through a variety of means including viewing natural scenes, being in natural settings, encountering plants and animals, participating in recreational activities, and undertaking environmental conservation work.

Fortunately, strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, trails and open spaces they are more likely to exercise. However, the proximity of a park to where people live is not the only factor that influences whether they will exercise there. Features such as adequate lighting, availability of toilets and drinking water, and park design and maintenance all affect how much the park will be used.

Greenbelt areas are a way to fulfill the goals of healthy living. Greenbelt areas in a community have been shown in several studies to increase regular physical activity, particularly among people that live nearby. The Safe Route to School program provides youth and families with walking and biking zones separate from vehicular traffic and can teach young people good attitudes toward exercise while they are young and impressionable.

Nature can be seen as an under-utilized public resource in terms of human health and well-being with the use of parks and natural areas offering a huge potential value for population health promotion. In this light, natural areas can be seen as one of our most vital health resources and providing access to enjoying nature and other physical activities provide numerous benefits to a community.

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## **ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION AREAS**

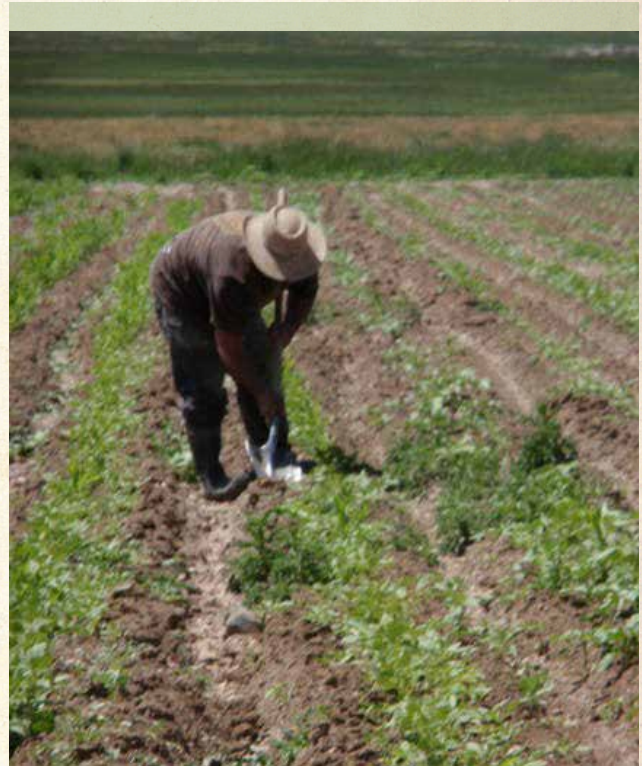
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### ***CONSERVATION AND RECREATION AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS***

Costilla County is blessed with extraordinary views, which is why the route south and then west across the county was designated as part of the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway. Its rich cultural heritage earned it recognition as a National Heritage Area. Both of these designations are useful tools to promote tourism as an industry within the County. However, while tourists are encouraged to drive through and maybe stop at one of the historic or cultural sites, there are no visible opportunities for them to get out of their cars and enjoy the natural resources that they see out their window. Developing and maintaining trails and parks that are accessible, clean, and well-signed and advertised would encourage these visitors to “stay and play” in the county.

### ***CONSERVATION AS COST-SAVINGS***

Farms, ranches, and forests are among the most common U.S. lands to be developed. For more than 15 years economists have been assessing the net economic benefit to communities of developing such lands, known as “costs of community services” (COCS) studies. The studies weigh anticipated economic benefits from various forms of development against the cost of delivering infrastructure and services to the development, such as schools, roads, and fire and police protection. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) has conducted 128 COCS studies in 25 states between 1989 and 2007. Averaging the results of those studies reveals that for every dollar communities realized from residential development, they had to deliver \$1.16 in services. On average, lands developed for commercial or industrial use required communities to deliver only \$0.29 in services for every dollar realized. On the other hand, farms and ranches demanded only \$0.37 in community services for each dollar of economic benefit. Specific results differ from community to community, of course. But in



*Productive agricultural land (© Devon Pena)*

general, results show that delivering services to residential development almost always costs more than the community can expect to realize in taxes and other benefits.

More generally, researchers have identified economic benefits that can come from protecting productive agricultural land. These include: .

1. A viable, local agricultural industry with employment opportunities,
2. Rural and environmental amenities, including viewsheds and wildlife habitat,
3. Local and national food security

### ***CONSERVATION AS A MEANS OF PRESERVING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES***

Intact natural systems perform multiple critical services that have an economic value. These include providing drinkable water, breathable air, and a stable climate; recycling waste; pollinating food crops; and providing physical buffers against storms. Though these services are difficult to monetarily value, they are critical. For example, in Costilla County, limiting road development in the higher elevations reduces erosion and sediment build-up in irrigation structures on the lower lands.



# County Identity:

## Chapter 4:

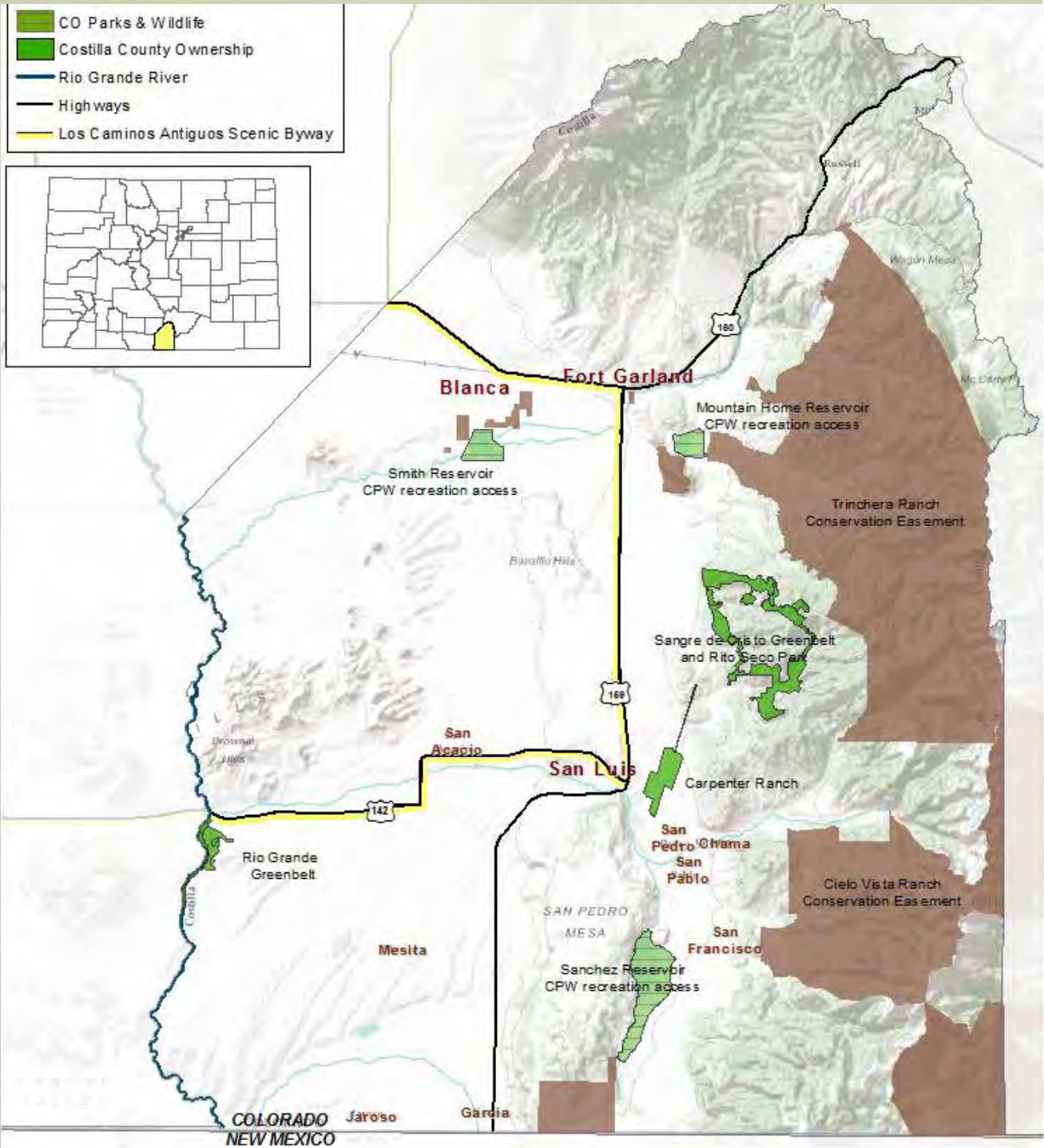
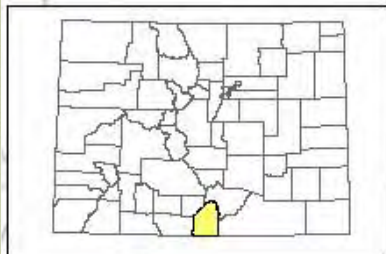
# Unique Qualities

## County Identity: Unique Qualities & Conditions



*Petroglyph Rock Art (© Ken Frye)*

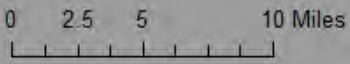
-  CO Parks & Wildlife
-  Costilla County Ownership
-  Rio Grande River
-  Highways
-  Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic Byway



## Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan

### County Overview Map

Data Sources: Colorado Ownership Management and Protection (COMaPv8), San Luis Valley GIS Authority, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Open Lands (COL)





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## **COSTILLA COUNTY OVERVIEW**

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### ***PHYSICAL CONTEXT***

Costilla County encompasses approximately 1,230 square miles (787,200 acres) of land located in south central Colorado, in a geographic area known as the San Luis Valley. The San Luis Valley is the broad, generally flat, valley at the headwaters of the Rio Grande River including six counties in Colorado and a portion of northern New Mexico. The San Luis Valley is bounded by the San Juan Mountains on the west and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east. The Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains roughly forms the eastern boundary of Costilla County, with the Rio Grande River serving as its western boundary. Blanca Peak, one of Colorado's 14,000 ft. peaks, serves as the county's prominent northern point. As illustrated in the County Overview Map, Costilla County has seven existing conserved easements and three county-owned open spaces. There are three reservoirs in the County, each of which has a recreational access easement held by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Costilla County was the first area of the state of Colorado to be colonized with recorded history dating back to 1540, the year Coronado explored the Southwest. The well documented account of Don Diego de Vargas' 1694 expedition and crossing of the Rio Grande includes numerous accounts of their travels through what is now Costilla County. Costilla County was one of the original 17 counties created by the Territory of Colorado on November 1, 1861. The county was named for the Costilla River; its county seat, San Luis, is the oldest town in Colorado. San Luis and the town of Blanca are the county's two incorporated towns. There are several unincorporated towns, the largest of which is Fort Garland; smaller unincorporated communities include: Chama, San Pedro, Los Fuertes, Garcia, Jaroso, San Francisco, San Acacio, and Mesita. Major access routes in Costilla County are Highway 160 which runs east west and enters into Costilla County from La Veta Pass over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east. In the town of Fort Garland Highway 159 cuts south to San Luis through the center of the county to New Mexico. At the town of San Luis, Highway 142 runs west through the Valley through the town of Manassa and ending at the town of Romeo. A portion of Highways 142, 159, and 160 comprise the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway.

### ***DEMOGRAPHICS AND CULTURAL CONTEXT***

According to the 2010 census, the population of Costilla County is 3,524, with approximately 1,500 households. Nearly 90% of residents were identified as being white; however, 64% of those residents identify as Hispano or Hispanic. Many in Costilla County still practice traditions first brought to the area by the original Spanish settlers. The Catholic religion and the fraternal order of Los Hermanos Penitentes have both played a central role in Costilla County's communities since approximately 1850 and remain important. Not only are the churches and religious structures important to residents, they also draw visitors to the County. It is the County's living history that gained Costilla County recognition as part of the federally designated Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. And it is the combination of its rich historic, cultural, and natural resources that made it one of the initial focus areas of the Department of the Interior's Great Outdoors America Initiative.

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### **SETTLEMENT PATTERNS: LAND GRANT AND WATER USE**

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#### ***HISTORY OF THE SANGRE DE CRISTO LAND GRANT***

The history behind the settlement of Colorado's oldest town, San Luis, founded on April 5, 1851 is a unique story among Colorado's communities.

Prior to 1821 Southern Colorado including Costilla County was part of Spain's New Mexico Territory. To foster the development of its colonial frontier, Spain awarded its officials with large land grants which permitted settlement and awarded grazing and timber rights. The Republic of Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821 and inherited Spain's New Mexico Territory. Mexico continued promoting the settlement of its unoccupied northern territories with land grants. These grants were often intended not just for the initial individuals for whom they are now named, but were also designed to foster communities which had communal resources and to create self-sustaining farming settlements.

From 1841-1844 Manuel Armijo, the last New Mexican Governor of the Mexican Republic, eager to secure his northern frontier from encroachment awarded 9,700,000 acres as land grants. All the land recipients had to do to

receive the grant was to pledge to defend Mexico against American westward expansion and encourage settlement. Governor Armijo awarded the million-acre Sangre de Cristo land grant to Narciso Beaubien and Stephen Luis Lee of Taos in 1844.

In May 1846 the Mexican-American War began and in August 1846 Governor Armijo chose not to resist General Stephen Kearny's American military forces and Kearney captured the city of Santa Fe without a shot being fired. After declaring the territory for the United States, Kearney appointed Narciso's father, Carlos Beaubien, to be a judge on the new territory's superior court in January 1847. However resentment of the American occupation was a constant source of friction and it became violent in January 1847 in the Taos Revolt, an insurrection against American occupation of northern New Mexico during the Mexican-American War. Both Narciso Beaubien and Lee were killed in the Taos Revolt. The Sangre de Cristo land grant then went to Narciso's father, Carlos, who also purchased Lee's share for \$100. As a Superior Court judge, Carlos Beaubien presided over the murder trials that resulted from the Taos Revolt, despite an obvious conflict of interest, and he sentenced many men to their death.

In 1851 Beaubien retired from public office and focused more of his attention on the settlement of his land grants. To entice settlers, Beaubien offered small tracts of land while setting aside certain common areas for grazing, wood-gathering and other uses. Beaubien's title to the Sangre de Cristo grant was confirmed by U.S. Congress in 1860. In 1861 Costilla County became one of the first seventeen territorial counties in Colorado. In 1863, Beaubien signed a Spanish language document setting aside commons lands for the use of new settlers who were at the same time given title to small farm plots, or varas, on the grant in specific areas around San Luis. Communal lands were the foundation of the subsistence economy that evolved in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. That document, now known as the Beaubien Document, guaranteed that all inhabitants of the grant would have the enjoyment of benefits of pastures, water, firewood and timber, always taking care that one does not injure another.

A year after the document was executed and recorded, Beaubien died. The grant was sold by his heirs to William Gilpin, Colorado's first territorial governor and a syndicate of foreign investors. The agreement transferring the land to Gilpin specified that Gilpin would provide deeds to vara strips to settlers that had not yet received them, respect



*San Luis People's Ditch*



*Aerial view of vara strips*

the settlement rights to the residents and confirm those rights. Gilpin and his partners soon divided the grant into the Trinchera Estate (at the north) and the Costilla Estate (at the south). Despite his promises Gilpin's syndicate often treated the settlers as trespassing squatters. Although many settlers were able to maintain control of their property, the new landowners began acquiring water rights, as well as timber and grazing rights in the area. Over the next several decades title to the land changed hands many times, portions of the grant were sold and the settlers' rights to their land were often contested. Although villagers continued to use the common lands, their rights were under constant threat. Many subsequent owners of the land grant, however, had no interest in the land other than reselling it someday.

### **SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

The settlement patterns for the county's thirteen towns occurred chronologically as follows:

- San Luis, Viejo San Acacio and San Francisco
- San Pablo, San Pedro, Chama and Los Fuertes
- Fort Garland

- Garcia
- Blanca, New San Acacio, Mesita and Jaroso

Several communities such as Eastdale, Garland City, Russell and Sierra no longer exist.

San Luis was established in 1851 by farmers migrating north from Taos, New Mexico. Located west of San Luis and south of Highway 142, Viejo San Acacio was established in 1852. Located about 10 miles south and east of San Luis, San Francisco was established in 1854.

San Pablo, San Pedro, Chama and Los Fuertes were also established as farming communities during the 1850s in an area known as Vallejos located between San Luis and San Francisco.

The United States established Fort Massachusetts in 1852 to assist travel and settlement in the San Luis Valley by leasing land from Carlos Beaubien for the military post near Blanca Peak. The Utes had actively resisted the first attempts of settlement in the San Luis Valley. In 1858 it was abandoned and replaced by Fort Garland named for Brigadier General John Garland. The Fort is a compound of buildings representing Territorial Adobe architecture. For 25 years, the adobe fort served to protect settlers and travelers in the area. In 1883 the Fort was abandoned following the confinement of Utes to reservations. Civilians continued to settle the area that would become the unincorporated town of Fort Garland.

Settlers started moving to the area around the community of Garcia on the Colorado-New Mexico border, formerly named Los Plazas Manzanares in 1849, but the first few attempts were driven out by the Utes. Permanent settlements by missionaries were established by 1860.

The now defunct 32 mile San Luis Southern Railroad is responsible for the initial development of the communities of Blanca, New San Acacio, Mesita and Jaroso. Located 4 miles west of Fort Garland on Highway 160, Blanca was established in 1908 by the San Luis Valley Land Company and it was incorporated in 1910. New San Acacio and Mesita were both developed by the Costilla Estates Development Company in the early 1900s. Located south of Mesita on the Colorado-New Mexico border, Jaroso was established in 1914 after a railroad depot was built there in 1910.

When the first communities of Costilla County were being settled, property was laid out in long rectangular parcels called vara strips, extensiones, or long lots as opposed to the nominal square grid parcels that most of the United States has today. This long-lot or extension design came

with the settlers from northern New Mexico, which came from Spain which in turn came from the Moors that had occupied Spain for several hundred years. This design was created for fairness so that the occupants of the land can all have equal access to waterways, and to the same types of terrain.

The San Luis Vega, or La Vega is the only Mexican-Era land grant commons in Colorado. Although land grants in New Mexico include commons lands utilized in a traditional manner, those tracts were established during the period of Mexican jurisdiction. By contrast La Vega was established after the US took possession of the area from Mexico. Continuing to serve its original purpose of communal grazing, La Vega was designated by an 1863 covenant for villagers living in the Culebra Basin. Allocated for use by residents of seven villages, the commons includes 633-acres and is maintained and managed by local descendants that still use the pasture for grazing.

### **Acequias**

The San Luis People's Ditch is the first adjudicated water right in Colorado established in 1852 and fourteen other acequias were established in the Culebra watershed by the end of 1861 when this area became part of the Colorado Territory. The waterways or ditches that irrigate the local farms and ranches are called acequias, an Arabic term meaning "the water conduit." There are currently 64 acequias in the local area. This Spanish/Mexican tradition

originated during the Moors' occupation of parts of Spain which occurred between 710-1490. Acequias are man-made earthen channels, or concrete lined ditches, which carry snow runoff and river water to distant agricultural fields. Acequias follow the contours of the land and utilize gravity to aid in irrigation. A system of acequias was built to distribute water to agricultural land using hand-dug earthen ditches, with water flowing by gravity from streams. The acequias irrigated extensiones, or narrow, long-lot fields, whose linear expanses sometimes extended several miles, providing settlers with lands of differing character suitable for varying agricultural uses, such as grazing, crop production, and timber.

Acequias mean much more to local residents than simply an irrigation ditch. Acequias support the culture and livelihood for hundreds of people living in Costilla County. The establishment of acequias was so important to the success of a new settlement that they were often dug before houses, churches and other buildings were finished. Survival is absolutely dependent on irrigation water in this region. Settlers had to come together to work in cooperation to establish rules and procedures through elections, governing and maintaining the use of water.

Each landowner along an acequia is called a *parciante* and the allocation and distribution of irrigated water among the *parciantes* is governed by an acequia commission including one person who is selected as steward, or *mayordomo*, of



*Town of San Luis from San Pedro Mesa*



the ditch. The mayordomo is in charge of water allocation and distribution and directs all work performed on the ditch and its structures. Everyone who irrigates with the system has an obligation to help maintain the ditch. The annual spring *limpeza* or ditch cleaning is when all the *parciantes* gather to clear accumulated silt and other debris from the temporarily dried ditch to prepare the ditch for the upcoming irrigation season.

### ***THE STRUGGLE FOR HISTORIC USE RIGHTS***

The most significant piece of commons land to the heirs of the land grant in the Culebra settlement area is a 77,000-acre mountain tract locally known as La Sierra. This part of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains is the watershed for the Culebra Creek. In 1960 Jack Taylor, a lumberman from North Carolina, purchased the mountain tract from Gilpin's successor in interest. The deed transferring the land indicated that Taylor's purchase was subject to "claims of the local people by prescription or otherwise to right to pasture, wood and lumber and so-called settlement rights in, to, and upon said land." The land was sold for \$7 an acre, a low price reflecting the "cloud" on the

title attributed to the use rights of the heirs. Despite the language in Taylor's deed, he denied the local landowners access to the mountain tract and he began to fence the property. Taylor then filed a Torrens title action in U. S. District Court to remove the cloud on the title. In 1964 the district court found that the local landowners did not have any rights to the mountain tract; the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the extinguishment of these rights.

In 1973, Taylor purchased an adjoining 2,500 acre parcel that was also part of the Sangre de Cristo grant (Salazar estate). Taylor's predecessor in title to the Salazar estate had also filed a Torrens title action in 1960 which determined that local landowners had no rights in the estate. Together, the mountain tract and the Salazar estate became known as the Taylor Ranch.

### **Lobato v. Taylor**

In 1981 a number of local landowners filed suit in Costilla County District Court and asserted that they had settlement rights to the Taylor Ranch and that Taylor had impermissibly denied those rights. The court held that the doctrine of *res judicata* (a matter already judged) barred the suit because the previous court decisions were binding upon the plaintiffs. The court of appeals affirmed this decision.

In 1991 a superior court reversed and remanded previous decisions, questioning the constitutional adequacy of the publication notice in the Torrens action that Taylor undertook in 1960. The higher court directed the trial court to determine which of the plaintiffs received adequate notice in the Torrens action and to hold a trial on the merits for those who did not have proper notice.

During the due process phase, the court dismissed most of the plaintiffs. The court determined that seven of the plaintiffs could pursue their claims regarding the mountain tract and that three of the plaintiffs could proceed with their claims regarding the Salazar estate. Without further hearing, the court denied class certification. The court then held a trial on the merits.

After the trial, the court made a finding of fact that the landowners or their predecessors in title had “grazed cattle and sheep, harvested timber, gathered firewood, fished, hunted and recreated on the land of the defendant from the 1800s to the date the land was acquired by the defendant, in 1960.” The trial court further found that the community referred to the Taylor Ranch as “open range,” and that prior to 1960, the landowners “were never denied access to the land.” The court also stated that it did “not dispute” that the settlers could not have survived without use of the mountain area of the grant.

Despite these findings, the court determined that the landowners had not proved prescriptive rights because their use was not adverse. The court further held that the Beaubien Document was not an effective express grant of rights because it did not identify the parties to the rights or the locations where the rights should be exercised. Regarding an implied grant by Beaubien, the court concluded that Colorado law did not recognize the implied rights the landowners claimed. The landowners appealed both the due process determination and the rulings on their claim of rights. The court of appeals affirmed the lower court’s decision and the case was brought before the Colorado Supreme Court.

### **RECOGNITION OF COMMONS LAND**

Between 2002 and 2003, in a significant series of three decisions, the Colorado Supreme Court partially restored the historic use rights of the plaintiffs in the Lobato v. Taylor land rights case.

On June 24, 2002 the Colorado Supreme Court held that landowners who are successors in title to the original settlers of what is now Costilla County have reasonable access rights for grazing, firewood, and timber to the property commonly known as the “Taylor Ranch.” Although some

landowners were personally served in the Torrens action, most were served by publication only. The Supreme Court concluded that reasonable access rights to the Taylor Ranch will be available for those Costilla County landowners who are successors in title to the original settlers of the Sangre de Cristo grant and who can trace the settlement of their properties to at least the time when William Gilpin owned the Taylor Ranch. The Court held that the publication notice given by Taylor when he initiated his Torrens action violated due process.

The Colorado Supreme Court decisions re-authorized 150 years of the exercise of rights of commons lands by heirs of the original Mexican land grant settlers. The highest state Court legitimized the relationship between land grant settlers and their commons. Families that could verify they were still living and working on properties that were privy to the original 1863 document issued by Carlos Beaubien, and who had been denied due process in the wake of Jack Taylor’s 1960s Torrens quiet title action, were to be designated as beneficiaries of these rights to the commons that is known as La Sierra.

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### **CURRENT LAND USE**

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Costilla County is located in south central Colorado’s San Luis Valley and is bordered by Las Animas County to the southeast, Huerfano County to the northeast, Alamosa County to the northwest, Conejos County to the southwest and the state of New Mexico, Taos County, to the south. The total land area of the county covers 786,130-acres, or approximately 1,230 square miles. The population of the county according to the 2010 census is 3,524.

Costilla County has over 70,000 acres of irrigated and prime agricultural farmland. The majority of land in Costilla County is rangeland, either vacant, or used for dry grazing. Rangeland comprises 47%, or approximately 372,000 acres of Costilla County. Another 39% of Costilla County is covered by forest. High elevation tundra is found in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains within Costilla County accounting for over 30,000 acres of land, almost all of which are located on private land.

Costilla is the 12th most subdivided county in Colorado. Currently 40 major subdivisions with close to 39,500 lots are platted on more than 181,760 acres, or approximately 25% of the land in Costilla County. Costilla County ranks number one in the state in vacant parcels with 39,707 vacant lots in 2007. By contrast the number two county in vacant parcels is Pueblo County with 29,863 vacant

lots, but with a population of over 159,000. Considering town lots, agriculture properties, etc., Costilla County has more than 49,405 platted lots. Absentee landowners living out-of-state, own a total of 34,283 parcels in the county. In 1998 Costilla County adopted a Land Use Code and zoned its unincorporated areas.

Twenty-five of the forty subdivisions in the county are zoned Estate Residential, allowing minimum lot sizes of less than 35 acres in size. Fifteen of the forty subdivisions are zoned Rural Residential intended for parcels larger than 35 acres in size.

The majority of these subdivisions would allow for minimum lot sizes of less than 35 acres. Assuming an average density of one unit per five acres for subdivisions in the Estate Residential and one unit per 35 acres for subdivisions in the Rural Residential district, build out of currently approved subdivisions could potentially add over 50,000 housing units and 125,000 people to Costilla County. In addition, non-subdivided land zoned Agricultural can also potentially be developed into lots at a density of one unit per 35 acres, adding another potential 15,000 units and 39,000 people to the county.

Due to the lack of infrastructure and lack of services available in the majority of subdivisions in the county, such as availability to water, power and sewer, this level of build out is extremely unlikely. While the majority of these subdivisions were carved with roads several decades ago, the market has shown very little demand for development of parcels within the subdivisions.

Today Costilla County has two incorporated towns, San Luis and Blanca and eleven other non-incorporated communities.

As a direct result of the private ownership of the land grant since its formal recognition in 1860 is the existence of large privately owned mountain tracts in the county. In 1999 Taylor sold his property to Lou Pai a former Enron executive. In 2004 Lou Pai sold the property to landowners Bobby Hill and Richard Welch and it was renamed Cielo Vista Ranch. Due to land purchases made since 1999 the ranch currently encompasses 82,000 acres and includes Culebra Peak, which is the only Colorado 14er to occur entirely on private lands. Heirs to the land grant continue grazing and wood gathering practices on the Cielo Vista Ranch.



*Elk crossing the field*

When William Gilpin and his partners divided the Sangre de Cristo land grant into the Trinchera Estate (at the north) and the Costilla Estate (at the south) in the 1860s, small parcels of the Trinchera Estate were slowly sold off in the following decades until the largest tract of unbroken land was about 243,000 acres, or roughly 400 square miles. It represented the northeast fourth of the original Sangre de Cristo Land Grant.

David Bryant Turner of Denver bought the Trinchera Ranch in 1913 but lost it in the stock market crash of 1929. Turner tried to sell it to the U.S. government but was rejected and lost the land. It was sold by receivers to lumber baron E.D. Wetmore of Warren, Pa. In 1938, Ruth and Albert Simms, former members of Congress from Albuquerque, bought what The Denver Post called then "Colorado's largest remaining ranch empire."

In 1950, after his wife had died, Albert Simms sold 90,000 acres of the ranch north of U.S. 160, known as the Blanca/Trinchera Ranch, now known as the Blanca Parcel, to Richard Heckendorf of Littleton, Colorado. Heckendorf sold it to a Texas oilman named Baker in 1962. Baker later sold it to R. Lacy Corp. of Texas, and so on, until Santa Feans Patsy and Billy Griffith bought it.

When Albert Simms died in 1964, his Colorado ranch and other significant holdings were left to nieces and nephews and their families. They sold the Trinchera parcel to pay estate taxes. Malcolm S. Forbes bought the Simms' southern portion of more than 150,000 acres for just over \$3 million in 1969. This would be known as the Trinchera Ranch. Forbes began subdividing in the late 1970s. Close to 70,000 acres were sold as homesites and real estate investments.

In the early 1980s, the Forbes family acquired the Blanca/Trinchera, or the northern 90,000-acre parcel, from the Griffiths.

In November 2007, Louis Moore Bacon an American hedge fund manager purchased both the Blanca Parcel and the Trinchera Ranch from the Forbes family. The 171,400-acre property is reported to have sold for \$175 million. The Trinchera Ranch is Colorado's largest donated conservation easement, which is held by Colorado Open Lands. In June 2012 Mr. Bacon along with the Department of the Interior announced plans that a conservation easement would be donated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for nearly 90,000-acres on the Blanca Parcel.

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## KEY FEATURES

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### AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Agriculture is the oldest and strongest industry in Costilla County. Costilla County has over 70,000 acres of irrigated and prime agricultural farmland. The larger farms in the county utilize center-pivot sprinkler irrigation. Center pivot irrigation generally relies on ground water pumped by wells to supply the water to the crops, although some center pivot sprinklers utilize small ponds and reservoirs to store water that is then pumped through the sprinkler system. The major crops produced under center pivot irrigation include potatoes, barley, oats, wheat, radishes, canola, alfalfa and hay. During the heyday of the railroads in the San Luis Valley, Costilla County produced a greater diversity and greater volume of vegetable crops including lettuce, spinach, cauliflower, broccoli and carrots.

Costilla County is still home to nearly 300 small family farms and ranches, most of which utilize surface water irrigation through the acequia system. Many of these small family farms still produce heirloom crops originally brought to the area as immigrants came north from New Mexico. Since the 1850's the farmers of San Luis, Colorado have been growing heritage chico corn and haba and bolita beans on their farms and ranches in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Pumpkins, squash, peas, red potatoes as well as hay and alfalfa are other crops still being produced through acequia irrigation.

Hundreds of families in Costilla County still actively engage in ranching. Most pasture is still irrigated through the acequia system. Beef cattle, sheep, goats and horses are the primary livestock produced in the county.

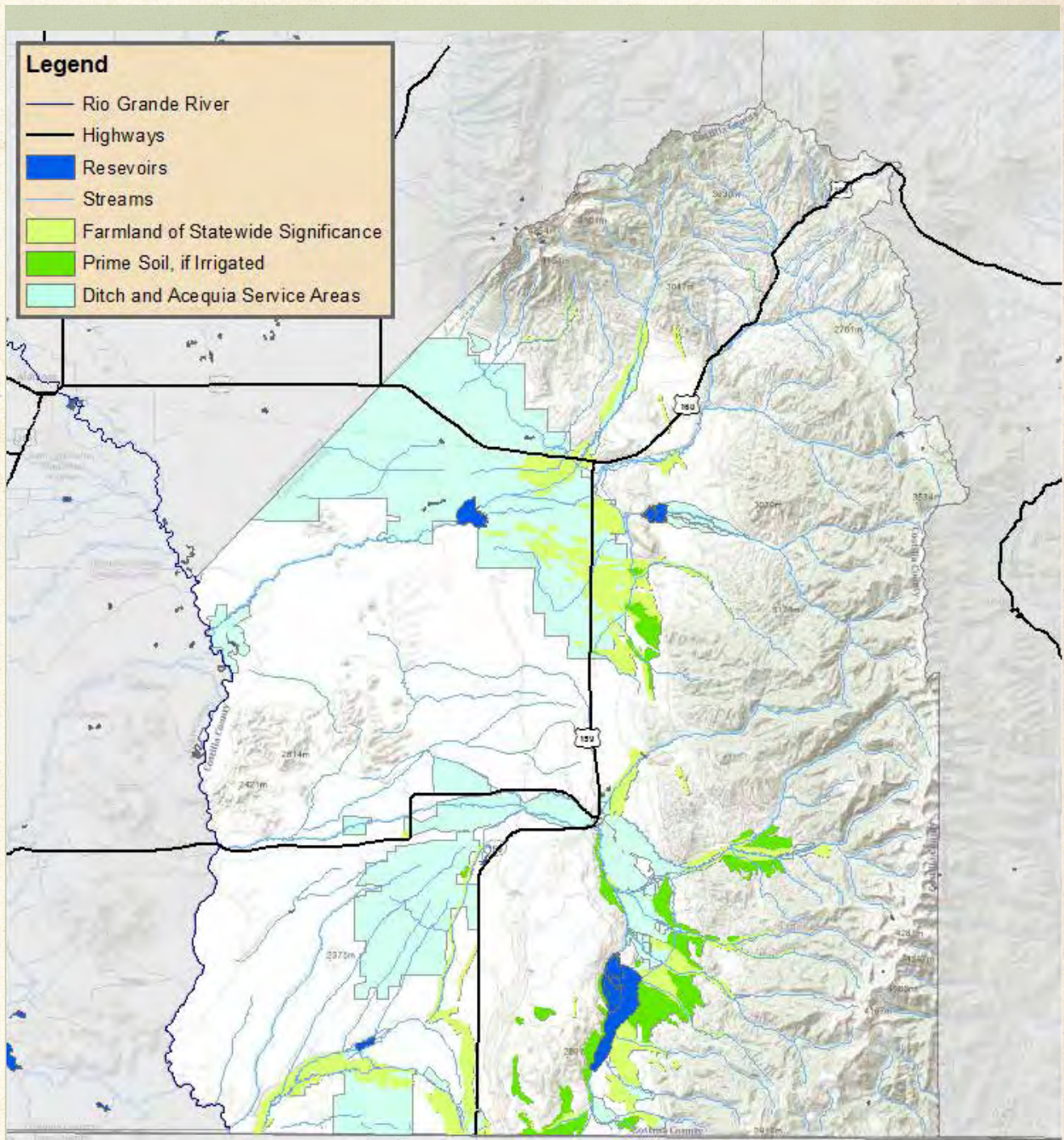
### RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Though there are virtually no federal or state public lands in Costilla County, the county does have a few recreational resources that offer opportunities for fishing, hiking, camping, exercise, passive recreation, and outdoor sports.

Three major reservoirs are located in Costilla County and have public access. These reservoirs have a unique management system that relies heavily on partnerships. The Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife leases the reservoirs from local water districts and helps maintain facilities.

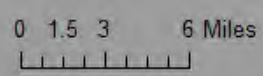
Smith Reservoir is located a few miles south of the town of Blanca. It provides access to fishing, bird watching, picnicking and car camping. Mountain Home Reservoir





**Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**  
**County Agricultural Resources Map**

Data Sources: US Department of Agriculture (USDA),  
 Colorado Decision Support Systems (CDSS)



is located a few miles east of Fort Garland within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision. This reservoir provides boating and fishing access, camping, picnicking, and the potential for hiking trails around the perimeter of the reservoir. The largest, Sanchez Reservoir, is located south of San Pablo and east of Wild Horse Mesa. Sanchez Reservoir provides boating and fishing access, camping, and picnicking. Because of its close access to San Luis, there is an opportunity to create a safe route from the Town to the Reservoir.

Several smaller reservoirs are located in the county, but only one, Stabilization Reservoir, located about 5 miles south and west of San Luis on Highway 159 also allows public access. Stabilization Reservoir offers picnic tables, fishing access and camping. Others, such as Eastdale reservoirs one and two are located on private property and do not allow public access.

The county has partnered with the Fort Garland Revitalization Committee in establishing a community park in Fort Garland with picnic tables, basketball courts, playgrounds, and picnic benches. The incorporated towns of Blanca and San Luis also have community parks that are maintained by the respective municipalities. The county has partnered with Ventero Open Press a local 501c3 coffee and art shop to develop and maintain a small park on Main Street in San Luis with a well maintained lawn, two picnic tables and a small water fountain.

Rito Seco Park is a county facility located in the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision and is available for day use and overnight camping. This popular park has good fishing access and picnic tables. Close by is the only established trail system in the county. The 3-mile multi-use trail was developed in the Greenbelt Recreation Area within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision. The main trailhead is located off of Balleroy Road. Though this trail is publicly accessible, it doesn't have the adequate signage to promote use.

The county owned Rio Grande Greenbelt Area located within the Rio Grande Ranchos Subdivision offers fishing, hiking, boating, camping and other day uses along the Rio Grande just south of State Highway 142. The county installed some fencing and cattle guards along the perimeter of the Greenbelt area, but there are no other developments, or amenities.

By obtaining a Great Outdoors Colorado Open Space grant, Costilla County purchased the 1227 acre Carpenter Ranch just east of the town of San Luis in 2005. The county has partnered with The Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust to protect the property with a

conservation easement and the property is managed as a working ranch. Grazing rights are offered in a lottery to local ranchers. Passive recreation such as hiking, bird watching and other day uses are allowed on the property.

The Blanca Fort Garland Community Center located just west of Fort Garland on State Highway 160 was created by a special recreation district ballot initiative in the northern half of Costilla County. Non-residents of the special district area can use the facility for a fee. The Center offers exercise classes, yoga, kick boxing, swimming, sauna, pool, weights, and personal training.

## **HERITAGE RESOURCES**

The Town of San Luis, the oldest town in Colorado, established in 1851, preserves its heritage through the continuation of time honored religious practices, Spanish language, agricultural techniques, and artistic expressions first brought to the area over 150 years ago by Spaniards, as well as influenced by contemporary artists and architecture. When you look across the vast stretches of private ranches or drive alongside roads that are adjacent to the state's first water rights, you notice the traditions and culture that are still preserved and celebrated. Sites such as the Sangre de Cristo Parish San Luis Church, La Capilla de Todos Los Santos, La Vega, San Luis People's Ditch, and Centennial Ranches are just a few examples of heritage resources within the County.

### **Spanish Language**

Few other places in the country will you find the continual use of 17th century Spanish, the language of early settlers. The language was brought to the San Luis Valley by the early conquistadores and pobladores (settlers). It is a dialect of Spanish that attributes to the county's geographic isolation, the proximity to indigenous languages, and the creativity of the language by Spanish speakers. The community's bilingualism and unique Spanish dialect are valuable components to the heritage of the county and serves as a source of pride.

### **Agricultural Techniques: Land and Water**

Ranching and farming as a result of land grant settlement characterize the county's unique cultural landscape and lend to its heritage resources. Land ownership was for the good of the family, the community and the church. Land was passed on from father to children and land division was based on the Spanish vara, long lot, system with each parcel of land having access to various terrains and water.



*Horno (© Devon Pena)*

These divisions are still visible today in the small villages of the region.

These practices depended on the acequia system of irrigation and communal pastures which function best when everyone participates. Acequia irrigation system, introduced by the Spanish, still sustains the small farms which dot the area. This communal irrigation system is dependent on the cooperation of all who live along the path of an irrigation canal. The farmers along each irrigation canal elect a mayordomo (ditch rider) to govern the allocation of water according to the legally deeded rights of landowners, all dependent on the mountain's drainage, ditch control and diversion. As an ancient but highly efficient method of farming, it contributes to the sustenance of the area's agricultural abundance. The San Luis People's Ditch is the first adjudicated water right in the state. There are currently approximately 64 acequias in the local area. Acequias follow the contours of the land and utilize gravity to aid in irrigation. Local acequia associations still exist today to serve as a regulatory body or government to maintain the use of water.

The community of farmers with heirship rights near San Luis and the surrounding villages also share a commons

established in 1851 still used for its original purpose, communal grazing, called "La Vega".

La Vega is the only Mexican-era land grant commons in Colorado. Although land grants in New Mexico include commons lands utilized in a traditional manner, those tracts were established during the period of Mexican jurisdiction. By contrast La Vega was established after the US took possession of the area from Mexico. Continuing to serve its original purpose of communal grazing, La Vega was designated by an 1863 covenant for villagers living in the Culebra Basin. Allocated for use by residents of seven villages, the commons includes 633-acres and is maintained and managed by local descendants that still use the pasture for grazing.

Communities celebrate the rich traditions associated with managing land and water rights. Acequia cleaning days are organized to bring community members together to clean out acequias to prepare them for irrigation of agricultural lands. It is very common to honor saints that help protect agricultural lands and water sources. Fostering understanding and appreciation for the area's ranching heritage as well as its water and natural resources, will be a key tool in the ongoing effort to conserve land.

## **Architecture**

Buildings through the county represent unique architectural styles that exemplify cross cultural influences. For example, the Costilla County courthouse built in 1883 in the Town of San Luis is a rare example of Territorial Style architecture and it is one of only two intact adobe courthouses in Colorado. Territorial architecture can generally be described as a mix between Pueblo and Victorian building styles. The methods and materials to build the courthouse are a blend of Anglo-European masonry and the traditional adobe materials used by the area's Hispano Settlers.

## **Religious Expressions**

Religious influences have a direct impact on artistic expressions, celebrations, and places of worship. Integral to Hispano culture is their Catholic faith. Every village built a church in honor of its patron saint as well as gathering places, moradas, of the Penitente brotherhood. This centuries-old lay religious order was integral to Hispano communities. They served to keep communities together spiritually, economically, and socially. Local festivals and events are a deep expression of the area's Hispano traditions that take place throughout the year in this area. Ceremonies, pilgrimages and festivals such as the Santa Ana and Santiago Festival are more than 150 years old and are still active today. Like the festivals, much of the art in the area is based on religious traditions. For example, artisans create religious icons such as Santero carvings.

San Luis, Colorado's oldest continuously inhabited community was established by Hispano settlers in 1851 and stands as an excellent demonstration of Hispano culture. The town's architecture, food, layout and religious structures all reflect the traditions of the early settlers.

## **SCENIC RESOURCES**

The Sangre de Cristo Mountains are the longest fault block range in North America and it is the unique way that the valley floor seems to drop away from the peaks that makes them so visually stunning. Driving along the primary highways in Costilla County, you are traveling along the flat valley floor, with a clear unfettered view of the Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, low dark sage hills to the west, Blanca Peak to the north, and the Latir Peak Wilderness to the south in New Mexico.

Consequently, the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway was designated in recognition of the unique visual resources in this area. The byway consists of Alamosa County Lane 6, US Hwy. 150, US Hwy. 160, Colorado Hwy. 17, Colorado Hwy. 159, and Colorado Hwy. 142.

The byway also includes city streets in Antonito, Romeo, Manassa, San Luis, and Fort Garland. Within Costilla County, the segments include a portion of Highway 160 from Fort Garland west to the county boundary; Highway 159, connecting Fort Garland to San Luis; some of the city streets in San Luis, and finally, Highway 142 from San Luis heading west to the Rio Grande River. Protecting the view shed along not only the scenic byway, but along the entire length of the county's major highways will be critical for maintaining the visual character of the county and for continuing to attract visitors.

## **ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

An "eco-region" is a description of physical characteristics including climate, physiography, soils and vegetation. Costilla County is divided into two major eco-regions and several sub-eco-regions. The two major eco-regions are the Southern Rockies and the Arizona-New Mexico Plateau. The seven sub-eco-regions within Costilla County are:

### **High Elevation Tundra**

High elevation tundra is located in the highest points of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the eastern edge of Costilla County, and on the top of Mount Blanca. The high elevation tundra is characterized by a cold climate and above-treeline vegetation and accounts for over 30,000 acres of land in the county.

### **Cool Moist Forest of Mid-High elevation**

The dense forest vegetation of this sub-eco-region consists of Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and aspen trees.

### **Warm Dry Forest of Mid-Low Elevation**







Located at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains the forests of this sub-eco-region consist of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and white fir.

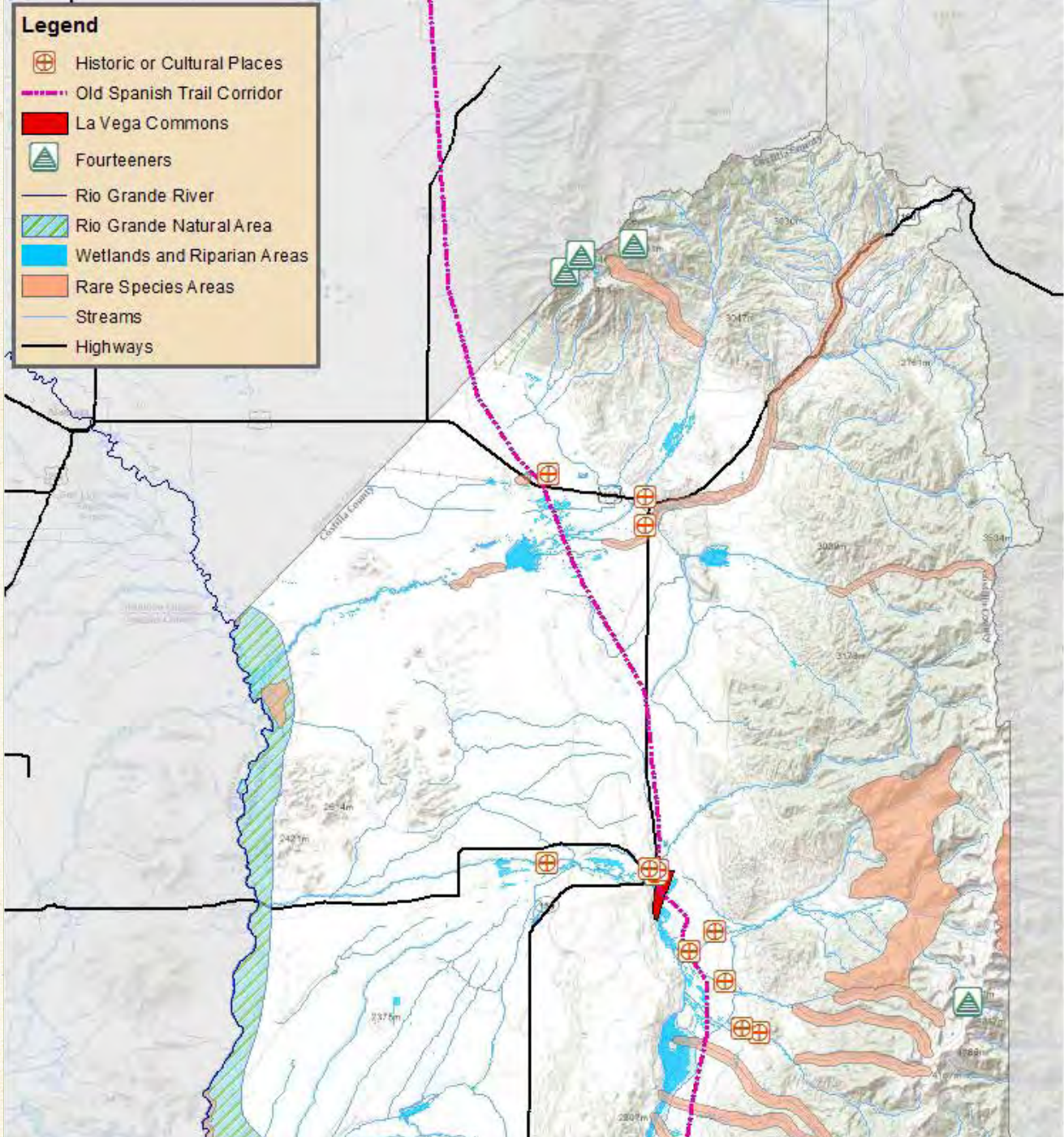
### **Southern Rockies Shrub land**

This sub-eco-region is characterized by low-mid elevation semi-desert wood, shrub and grass lands in a semi-arid climate. Vegetation in this zone is dominated by pinion and juniper woodlands and often intermingles with grasslands and shrub lands.

### **Arizona-New Mexico Plateau Shrub land**

The Arizona-New Mexico Plateau shrub lands is the largest sub-eco-region in Costilla County and is located at a lower elevation than the Southern Rockies shrub lands. The

- Legend**
-  Historic or Cultural Places
  -  Old Spanish Trail Corridor
  -  La Vega Commons
  -  Fourteeners
  -  Rio Grande River
  -  Rio Grande Natural Area
  -  Wetlands and Riparian Areas
  -  Rare Species Areas
  -  Streams
  -  Highways



**Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**  
**County Natural and Cultural Resources Map**

Data Sources: US National Park Service (NPS),  
 Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP),  
 National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), Colorado Open Lands



vegetation is characterized by sagebrush and rabbitbrush, native grasses such as blue grama and western wheatgrass and cactus.

### **Irrigated Flatlands**

Irrigated flatlands are interspersed within the Arizona-New Mexico Plateau shrub lands sub-eco-region. Crops, cultivated grasslands and shrub lands provide the vegetation found in this zone.

### **Salt Desert**

The salt desert sub-eco-region is located along a small portion of the western edge of Costilla County and it is the lowest elevation sub-eco-region in Costilla County. Vegetation in this zone consists of salt grass, greasewood shrubs and cactus.

### **Rare and Imperiled Species and Plant Communities**

The Colorado Natural Heritage Program CNHP tracks and ranks Colorado's rare and imperiled species and plant communities. In 2003, CNHP inventoried Costilla County and identified Potential Conservation Areas within the county around wetland and riparian sites.

The following is an excerpt of the report:

High quality examples of wetlands and riparian areas and those supporting populations of rare wetland-dependent species were given highest priority. Such locations were identified by: (1) examining existing biological data for rare or imperiled plant and animal species and significant plant communities (collectively called elements) from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program's database, (2) accumulating additional existing information on these elements, (3) input from local citizens of Southern Alamosa and Costilla counties and more specifically, the San Luis Valley Wetland Focus Area Committee, and, (4) conducting extensive field surveys. Areas that were found to contain significant elements were delineated as Potential Conservation Areas (PCA). These areas were prioritized by their biological urgency (the most rare or imperiled) and their ability to maintain viable populations of the elements (degree of threat). A qualitative functional assessment was conducted at most of the wetland and riparian areas visited.

Costilla County contains portions of eighteen PCAs, four of which are rated as having very high biodiversity significance (globally). As illustrated on the Costilla County

Natural and Cultural Resources Map, the following PCAs are located in Costilla County:

- Culebra Creek Montane Complex
- Rio Grande at Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge
- Sangre de Cristo Creek
- Jaroso Creek
- Torcido Creek
- Cuates Creek
- Rio Grande at State Line
- South Vallejos Creek (Vallejos Creek No. 2)
- Little Ute Creek
- Alamosito Creek
- North Vallejos Creek
- North Fork Trinchera Creek
- Rio Grande at Trinchera Creek
- Teddys Peak
- Trinchera Creek below Smith Reservoir
- La Sauses
- Elk Meadows Fen
- Blanca Greasewood Flats

## **WATER RESOURCES**

Three drainage basins exist in Costilla County. In order of size these drainages are the Trinchera Creek, Culebra Creek and Costilla Creek. The Trinchera Creek Basin covers the northern half of Costilla County. The Culebra Creek Basin covers the majority of the southern half of the county with Costilla Creek draining the areas in the vicinity of Mesita, Garcia and Jaroso communities.

Costilla County is bordered on its western edge by the Rio Grande River, the second largest river in the United States.

# Priority Projects

## Chapter 5:

# Implementation Plan

## Priority Projects & Implementation Plan



*Rio Grande Greenbelt Park*



## Open Space Opportunities & Priorities

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### DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES AND IDENTIFYING PROJECTS: COMMUNITY INPUT AND ANALYSIS

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This chapter outlines opportunities and projects that Costilla County residents are most interested in seeing the county implement. This chapter was created through the efforts of the Working Group reaching out to the community via public surveys and public meetings. Two different surveys gave County residents and visitors an opportunity to share their vision, ideas, and voice their concerns. A survey conducted in April 2011, requested input on the types of recreational areas and activities that community members were interested in seeing conserved, improved or further developed. More specifically, the Working Group requested input to the following questions:

- What types of parks and recreation facilities are you most interested in seeing developed/further developed?
- What would be your primary activity in a park? (rank your top three choices)
- What types of trails are you most interested in seeing developed? (rank your top three choices)
- What would be your primary activity on a trail? (rank your top three choices)
- What destinations are you most interested in seeing connected by trails? Please specify.
- What types of open space are you most interested in seeing protected? (rank your top three choices)
- Who should manage and operate the parks, open space and trail system?
- How important is it to you that facilities are developed to showcase heritage to visitors (such as a historical walking trail through San Luis)?

- What specific trail, recreation and open space projects are you most interested in seeing developed?

The answers helped guide the Working Group in focusing on specific areas for conservation. It also shed some light on what the community views as recreational resources and how the community would utilize recreational areas if they were further developed. The Working Group took the responses generated during the first survey and created a second survey that focused on prioritizing projects for the county to consider in current and future planning.

The following summary from the second survey responses also helped create the content for this chapter:

- County residents are interested in projects that protect water resources, wildlife areas, historic/cultural resources, water rights, scenic areas, and agricultural lands.
- County residents will support projects that increase opportunities for public use and enjoyment of open lands.
- County residents will support projects through volunteering their time to support initial development and management and participate in programs and events.
- Residents would like the county to consider improving existing county parks, develop youth service projects, develop safe bicycle routes, and organize and maintain a county program.
- The two highest priority areas for improvement are the Town of San Luis Park and the Sanchez Reservoir.

This comprehensive section takes into consideration the areas of the county that communities would like to see protected as public space or as a private conserved land and provides recommendations on land protection actions by



individuals, public entities, and non-profit organizations. It also assesses the current conditions of existing recreational areas, including parks and trails, and provides recommendations on improvements or development of additional recreational areas. Most importantly, this chapter provides recommendations for thoughtful financial planning and leverage from financial sources and partnerships to implement these project ideas. The ideas incorporated in this chapter will help ensure that Costilla County is a place where people can enjoy publicly accessible places for recreation.

### **WHAT IS OPEN SPACE?**

Open Space has many definitions and means different things to different people, depending on their own context. Open Space is generally referred to as an undeveloped or minimally developed land and water resources, sometimes it does not include land used for agricultural purposes. In this plan, we take a broad sense of the term, as borrowed from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (and slightly modified).

*Open space may be defined as an area of land or water that either remains in its natural state or is used for agriculture, free from intensive development for residential, commercial, industrial or institutional use. Open space can be publicly or privately owned. It includes agricultural and forest land, undeveloped scenic lands, public parks and preserves. It also includes water bodies. Open Space projects may also be associated with trails, recreation, or protection of archaeological, historical, or culturally significant sites.*

The goals of the Open Space section of this Plan are:

- To encourage and guide thoughtful and well-rationed land protection actions by public entities, individuals, and by nonprofit organizations such as Colorado Open Lands and Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust; and
- To ensure thoughtful expenditure of public moneys, and to leverage additional money from other sources for implementation of the plan.

The goals of the Open Space section, and the criteria to be applied to potential projects, have been guided by the County's community engagement process and survey and have been carried forward by the Working Group in the belief that they will serve the needs of Costilla County far into the future. Nevertheless, the plan should be reviewed as progress is made in building a cohesive system of open spaces, as development and open space needs evolve, and as new information becomes available.

As the initial step in the community engagement process, County residents and partners were given the opportunity to identify areas of the County that they would like to see protected in some way, either as a public space or as private conserved land. The areas that were pointed out by residents were representative of different types of conservation values, such as excellent elk habitat or prime agricultural land. In a mail survey conducted several months later, questions were refined to determine what types of conservation values residents were most interested in protecting. Specifically, residents were asked:

*Which of the following criteria should the County consider when prioritizing projects? Mark all that apply.*

65% felt it would be important to "Protect water resources (rivers, wetlands)"

64% marked "Increase opportunities for public use & enjoyment of open lands (allows access)"

62% marked "Protect wildlife areas"

60% checked "Protect historic/cultural resources"

58% wanted to "Protect water rights (such as acequias)"

54% wanted to "Protect scenic areas"

51% marked "Protect agricultural land (farms and ranches)"

32% felt that the project should "Serve as an example for other projects"

There are many techniques available for both public and private entities to protect critical conservation values of the County that will contribute to the mission and goals of this Plan; consequently, in this section we discuss public protection, private conservation, and regulatory approaches.

### **EXISTING OPEN SPACE RESOURCES**











Approximately 133,000 acres in Costilla County are currently open space – some in public ownership, but most in permanently protected private conservation easements. Costilla County has several existing conservation easements that have been protected by Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Colorado Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. In addition, Costilla County has two designated greenbelts which serve as important open space and recreation areas (these are discussed further in the Trails section of the plan).

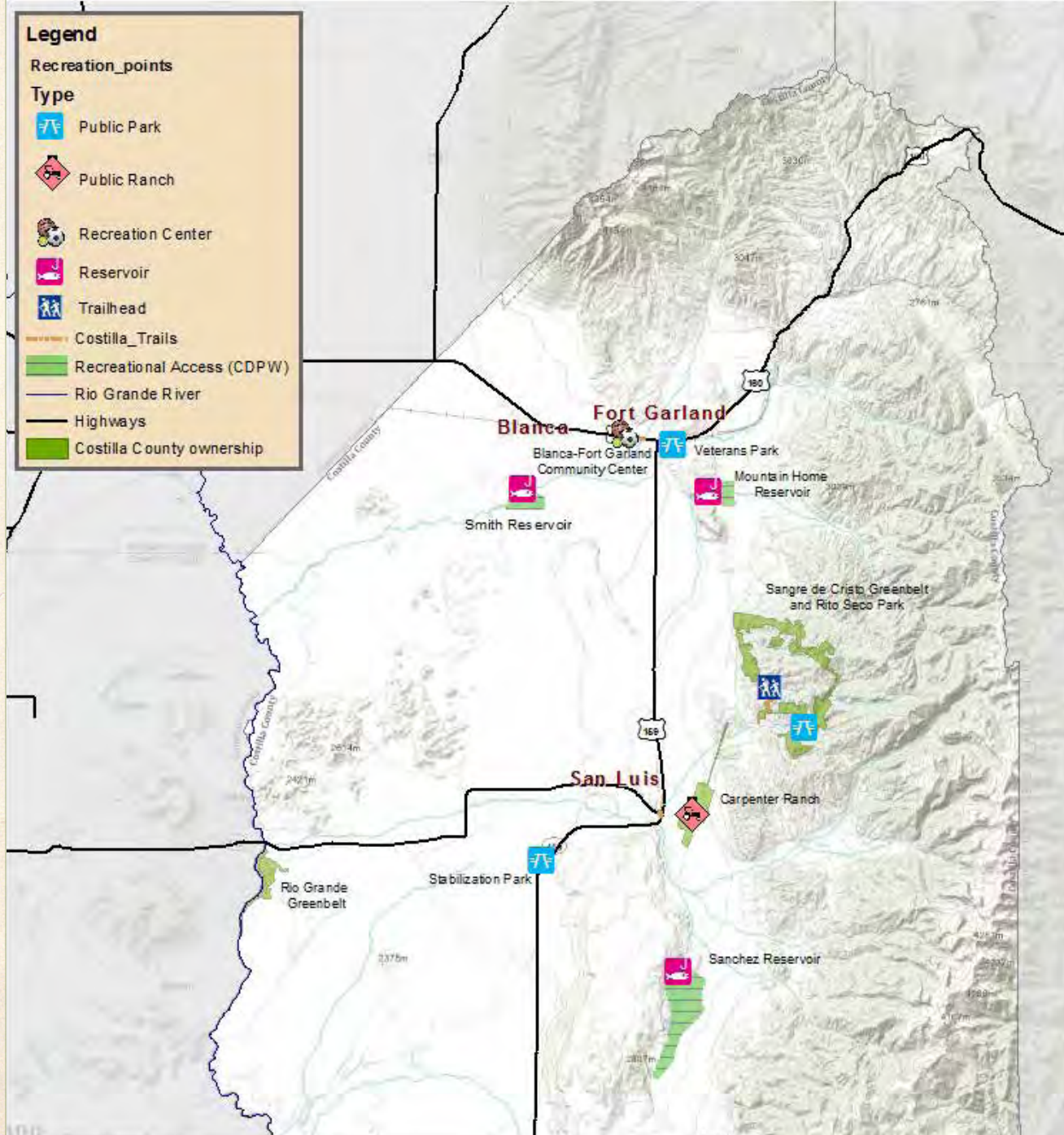
The Carpenter Ranch, an open space that was purchased by Costilla County and also has a conservation easement

**Legend**

Recreation\_points

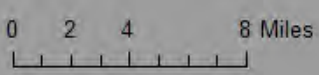
Type

-  Public Park
-  Public Ranch
-  Recreation Center
-  Reservoir
-  Trailhead
-  Costilla\_Trails
-  Recreational Access (CDPW)
-  Rio Grande River
-  Highways
-  Costilla County ownership



**Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**  
**County Recreation Resources and Opportunities Map**

Data Sources: Colorado Ownership Management and Protection (COMaPv8), San Luis Valley GIS Authority, Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Open Lands (COL)



on it, provides a great illustration of all of the things that an open space can be. In 2004, the County was able to purchase this 1,227 acre property, located approximately 2 miles east of the town of San Luis. Historically, this was a ranch property with senior water rights on the Cerro Ditch (an acequia). Currently, the County manages the property for limited livestock grazing, determined on a lottery basis. The availability of this property for grazing for residents provides great economic benefit to the community. The property is also available for low impact recreational use, such as bird watching and provides an accessible space for community events, such as the Get Outdoors Costilla County! event that was hosted by the Trails, Recreation, and Open Space working advisory group in October 2011. Furthermore, the protection of this property prevented subdivision and possible loss of water rights, which would have negatively impacted the rural and open character of the area and could have injured other irrigators on the acequia.

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## **COSTILLA COUNTY OPEN SPACE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES**

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### ***REGULATORY STRATEGIES***

#### **Zoning**

Scenic Conservation Overlay District is a special district that is superimposed on all or part of an existing district; it imposes additional requirements intended to protect critical scenic resources. Often this is determined using a buffer from a particular line of view, such as a roadway. In Huerfano County, a Scenic Conservation Overlay District was created to protect the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway. Scenic overlay districts commonly include provisions related to:

- Allowed/prohibited uses
- Density and clustering
- Building and site design
- Roads and utilities
- Vegetation and screening

Requirements may include additional setback from roadways (for example: a requirement that a building must be set back one foot for each foot of vertical height), use of building materials that blend into the landscape, or use of visual screens, such as trees.

This type of overlay district could also be created for sensitive natural resources, such as river corridors.

### ***INCENTIVE PROGRAMS***

#### **Using Density Bonuses to Protect Critical Resources**

Density bonuses use a carrot, rather than stick, approach to protecting resources by rewarding land developers for certain actions such as clustering development, or avoiding developing in and around sensitive resources (such as riparian areas). For example, if a developer buys a piece of property with zoning that allows one home per two acres, but half of the landholding is Southwest Willow Flycatcher habitat, the County may offer to allow a higher density on the non-sensitive portion of the property if the owner agrees not to build on the flycatcher habitat.

### ***REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS***

1) The Planning and Zoning Department considers a Scenic Conservation Overlay District and a Rio Grande River Conservation Overlay District with additional building restrictions designed to protect the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway and the Rio Grande River. The proposed districts would be subject to all applicable County policies regarding public hearings. Please see the appendix for useful references for overlay districts.

2) The Planning and Zoning Department considers a policy of allowing density bonuses for development that meets established criteria for protecting critical scenic, natural, cultural, or archaeological resources. The policy could be implemented on a case by case basis, depending on the resources within the development proposal. Please see the appendix for useful references for density bonus considerations.

### ***STRATEGIES FOR FEE LAND ACQUISITION (PUBLIC OWNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC USE)***

#### **County acquisition through tax liens on parcels.**

Costilla County is unique in that although it is one of the most platted counties in Colorado, it is the least dense. With the majority of its subdivision lots having never been developed, Costilla County has the most vacant subdivision lots in the state. Many owners of these lots live outside of Costilla County (and many live outside of the

United States). Many have never seen the land that they own and have difficulty locating their parcel if they do ever try to find it. Consequently, many owners decide to simply stop paying their annual property taxes.

The tax lien sale is the final step in the Treasurer's efforts to collect property taxes. A tax lien is placed on each property in the county on January 1 each year and remains until the property taxes are paid. If the property owner does not pay the taxes on their property by late October, the county sells the tax lien at the yearly tax lien sale. The tax lien is auctioned to the highest bidder, who then becomes the tax lien certificate holder. Tax liens not sold at the sale are "struck off" to the county. County-held certificates are available for purchase for the cost of the value of the certificate plus an assignment fee. Certificates are eligible for a Treasurer's Deed application after the lien has remained unpaid for three years from the date of the original sale.

In this way, Costilla County has acquired several thousand parcels of land. Rather than placing all of these parcels up for sale, the County may strategically choose which parcels to retain and which parcels to dispose of through sale or trade.

### **County acquisition through trade**

The County can choose to retain ownership of parcels for public use, but it can also maintain a portfolio of attractive parcels that do not make sense for public use, but may be offered as land swaps for parcels that: 1) have sensitive archaeological, cultural, or natural resources, or 2) are attractive for public use. In this way, the County can acquire fee parcels without expending cash resources.

### **County acquisition through purchase**

For very high priority acquisition projects, the County may consider a purchase or bargain purchase of parcels. Ideally, funding can be leveraged from different sources and where appropriate, the land may be first encumbered with a conservation easement to reduce the development potential. The County may also try to leverage a donation component from the landowner, so that the County may purchase the price for less than full market value.

## ***FEE ACQUISITION RECOMMENDATIONS***

Maintain an updated database of County-owned parcels and tax delinquent parcels and utilize GIS data to determine whether to keep or dispose of parcels. Consider keeping parcels that: 1) are suitable for public access (or buffer or expand publicly accessible places), 2) protect sensitive

natural, cultural, or archaeological sites, or 3) may be kept in a portfolio for future trade to obtain lands that do meet criteria 1 or 2.

County ownership of land does take that land off of the tax rolls, thus reducing revenue to the County and this should be kept in mind. There may be instances where the county can, either through tax lien or land trade, acquire a block of subdivision parcels. The county may then consolidate the parcels back into a single ownership and re-sell with development restrictions (or a conservation easement).

For high priority acquisitions, particularly those that increase or improve public access, the County should consider utilizing partnerships to seek funding to acquire key parcels.

## ***FEE ACQUISITION FUNDING SOURCES***

### **Great Outdoors Colorado – Local Government Program**

A grant program that allows cities, counties, and park and recreation districts with funds to acquire, expand, and improve local parks, outdoor recreation amenities, and environmental education facilities.

### **U.S. Forest Service – Community Forest Program**

The Community Forest Program is a grant program that authorizes the Forest Service to provide financial assistance to local governments and nonprofit entities in order to establish community forests that provide continuing and accessible community benefits.

### **Colorado Conservation Trust Fund**

These are lottery proceeds which are directed to local governments for the acquisition, development, and maintenance of new conservation sites or for capital improvements or maintenance for recreational purposes on any public site.

## ***PRIORITY PROJECTS FOR FEE ACQUISITION AND/OR TRADE***

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE PROTECTION**

**Description:** Costilla County has a long and interesting history and traces of that history can still be found. In order to protect critical archaeological and historic resources and

sites, parcels with unique resources have been identified. The Planning and Zoning Department should check any incoming proposals for development against this list. The County could then consider whether to try to offer a parcel trade in order to acquire the sensitive parcel.

### **SANGRE DE CRISTO GREENBELT EXPANSION – BATENBURG MEADOWS ADDITION**

**Description:** The County was deeded a greenbelt when the Sangre de Cristo Ranches subdivision was first platted; for several years Colorado Parks and Wildlife has hosted a summer youth camp on the greenbelt area, and for some time used an area known as the Batenburg Meadows, until it was discovered that the meadow was privately owned. The meadow area and associated wetlands are actually three privately-owned parcels within the subdivision. The meadows would be a fantastic addition to the existing greenbelt area, as they contain a series of beaver ponds, which support excellent fishing. Colorado Parks and Wildlife would prefer a total acquisition of 11 parcels totaling 106 acres; however, acquisition of three parcels (25.34 acres) have been identified as top priorities. The Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt is the only publicly-accessible forested land in the County. This forested land is utilized by the community, not only for recreation, but also as a place where the community can harvest firewood and gather piñon nuts. These specific parcels are critical, as they provide a unique area in which CPW can teach youth hunting and fishing skills. (*Refer to Appendix 3 - Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision*)

**Acreage:** Tier One priority is 25.34 acres; Tier Two priority is additional 81 acres

**Location:** west of the town of San Luis, located in the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision

**Partners:** Costilla County and Colorado Open Lands

**Estimated Cost:** \$100,000\*

*\*This project may be a good fit for the USFS Community Forest Program*

### **RIO GRANDE RANCHOS GREENBELT EXPANSION – BRAUN ADDITION**

**Description:** Costilla County owns a “Greenbelt” along the Rio Grande that is 862 acres. There is a 47-acre privately

owned parcel adjacent to the Greenbelt to the north, which provides access to it known as the “Braun Property”. While there is an existing access easement across the Braun Property to the Greenbelt, Costilla County would like to purchase fee title to the Braun Property to secure access and ultimately use that parcel to create infrastructure such as parking, signage, possibly a boat ramp, etc.

South of the Greenbelt in “Rio Grande Ranches” there are numerous five acre lots between the Greenbelt and the main access road to the greenbelt. The vast majority of these lots have no structures. The County is seeking funds to purchase the lots to secure access to and expand the southern stretch of the Greenbelt. (*Refer to Appendix 4 - Rio Grande Ranchos and Rio Grande River Ranchos Subdivision*)

**Acreage:** Tier One priority is 47 acres; Tier Two priority is 215 acres

**Location:** on the Rio Grande, adjacent to Highway 142 (south side)

**Partner(s):** Costilla County, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT), Colorado Open Lands (COL)

**Estimated Cost** = \$50,000 (for Braun parcel only)

### **RIO GRANDE RIVER BUFFER**

**Description:** In 2006, the U.S. Congress designated the Rio Grande Natural Area as a one-quarter mile buffer on either side of the Rio Grande River. The purpose of the area was to establish a management plan across land ownerships (voluntary for private land) in order to conserve, restore, and protect the natural, historic, cultural, scientific, scenic, wildlife, and recreational resources of the area. If taxes become delinquent within this area, the County should seek to acquire to keep or consolidate parcels before re-sale with restrictions limiting development to protect the Rio Grande River (See Appendix 4 for lists of parcels).

**Partners:** Costilla County, Rio Grande Natural Area Commission

### **STEGER RANCH**

**Description:** Located just north of the village of San Francisco and twelve miles south and east of the town of San Luis, the 971 acre Steger property has been identified by Costilla County as a potential priority acquisition parcel. The property lies within the San Francisco and Vallejos Watersheds and is surrounded by pinion juniper

woodlands on the western edge, agricultural lands on the northern and southern edges while the eastern edge is flanked by brush prairie.

The property is vital in the migratory pattern of elk from upper pastures in the east to lower pastures in the west providing critical winter pasture and serving as a holding area to prevent elk influx into nearby agricultural lands. Costilla County believes that a conservation easement on the property in conjunction with county ownership would be appropriate.

Costilla County has concerns that the property is at risk of being purchased and partitioned for small parcel development through the creation of a new subdivision.

**Acreage:** 971

**Location:** 12 miles south and east of the town of San Luis, near the town of San Francisco

**Partner(s):** Costilla County

**Estimated Cost** = \$283,000

## **VISTA GRANDE ESTATES SUBDIVISION**

**Description:** Located just north of Highway 142 and east of the Rio Grande and east of a section of the Rio Grande Ranchos Subdivision, the Vista Grande Subdivision is 100% vacant and 92% of the lots are currently owned by Costilla County. Although this subdivision does not border the Rio Grande it is located just east of the river and close to the Rio Grande Greenbelt area. The county should consider strategies and funding sources to obtain the remaining lots in the subdivision and consider vacating roads, consolidating parcels and make the area a public use park.

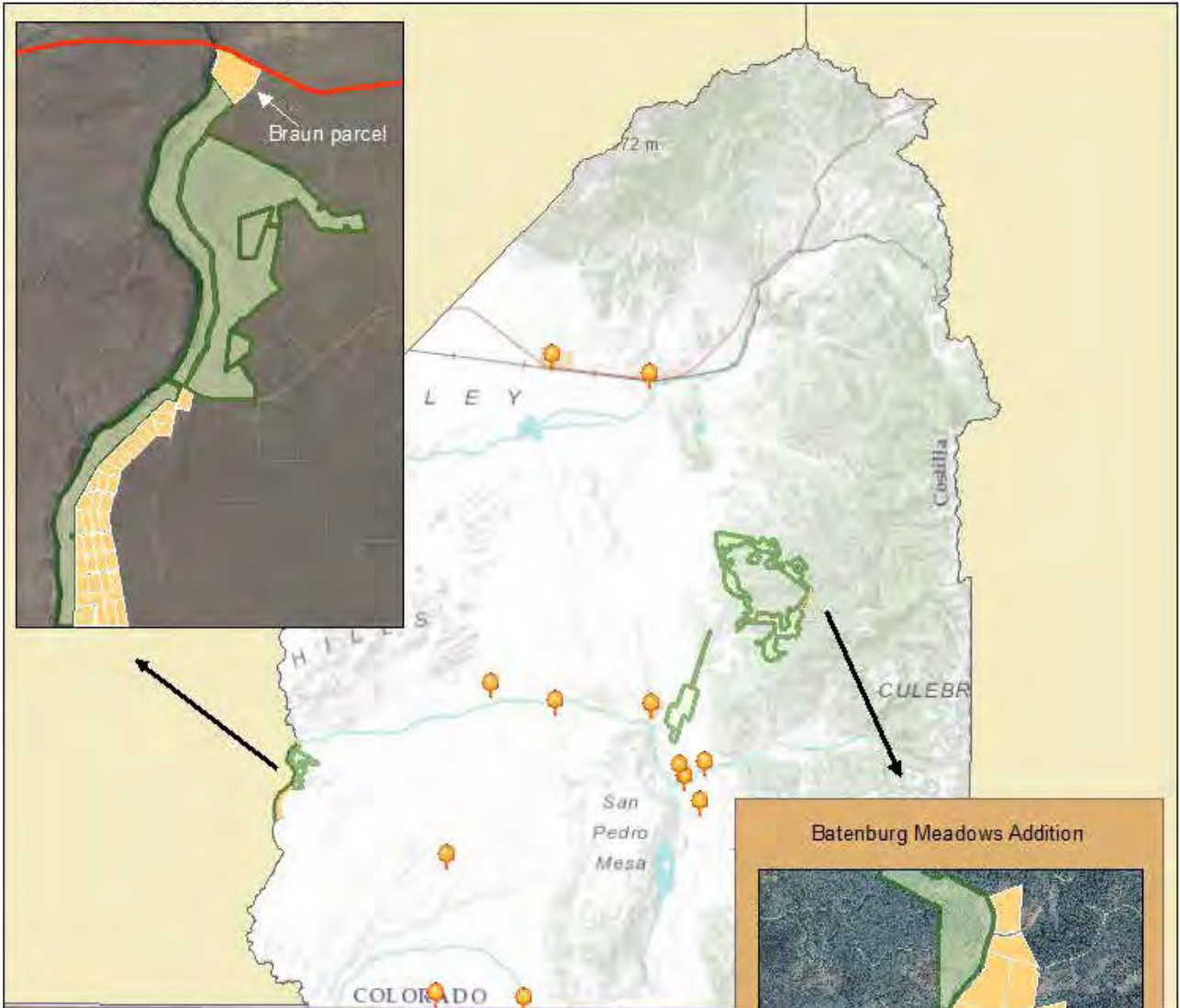
### ***CONSERVATION EASEMENTS (PRIVATE OWNERSHIP WITH PRIVATE USE WITH PUBLIC BENEFIT)***

A conservation easement is a voluntary restriction, placed by a landowner, on the use of his or her property to protect significant natural areas, agricultural lands, open spaces, wildlife corridors, or historic structures on that property. The owner retains title to the property and donates the easement to a qualified conservation organization such as a



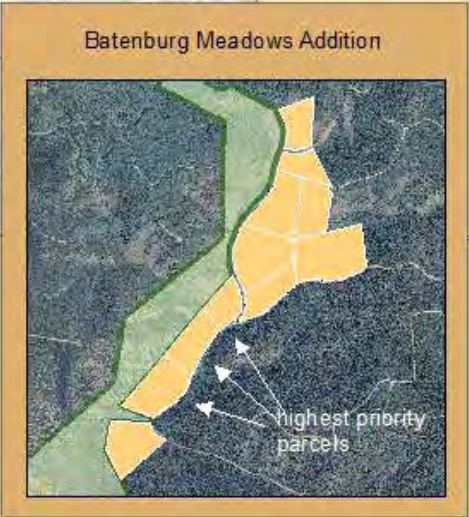
*View of Braun Property*

Rio Grande Ranchos Addition



Rio Grande Ranchos Addition  
 261 acres total  
 Braun Parcel = 46 acres  
 41 parcels of 4-7 acres each

Batenburg Meadows Addition  
 105 acres total  
 11 parcels of 5 - 13 acres each



**Fee Acquisition Priorities**

Data Sources:  
 San Luis Valley GIS Authority,  
 Colorado Open Lands (COL)

- Priority Parcels
- County-owned property
- Costilla towns



land trust, thus ensuring that future owners of the land can only use the property for the purposes specified in the easement by the landowner. Conservation easements in Colorado range in size from a few acres to thousands of acres.

Conservation easements can be held by qualified entities, including land trusts (which are 501(c)3 entities) and certain government entities. In addition to the federal qualifications for conservation easement holders, the state of Colorado has a certification program for land trusts and government entities that want to hold conservation easements.

Landowners who donate a conservation easement to a qualified entity in Colorado are eligible for federal and state tax benefits. For more information, contact Colorado Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, or the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts.

Benefits to communities and local governments of using conservation easements to protect working lands include: protection is achieved but land stays on the tax role, the county does not have to spend money on maintaining the land, and the operation continues to provide a stream of benefits to the local economy such as agricultural jobs.

## ***PRIORITY PROJECTS FOR CONSERVATION EASEMENTS***

### **Identifying Priority Conservation Easement**

#### **Parcels**

Protecting water resources was the highest priority for Costilla County residents, followed by public access, wildlife habitat, ecological resources, agricultural land, and scenic viewsheds.

Working with a class at the University of Colorado Denver, Colorado Open Lands compiled spatial data to try to capture these protection priorities (please see Appendix 6 for a list of data and sources). Colorado Open Lands created a model that compiled, weighted, and analyzed conservation values in a Geographic Information System (GIS). Conservation values are divided into four categories: Habitat, Riparian, Agricultural, and Scenic. As shown in the model below, each category is comprised of several different data layers and the Habitat category contains three sub-layers: Ecologically Important [wildlife] Species, Economically Important [wildlife] Species, and Rare Plants. In the model, the four main categories are weighted according to their priority within

the public survey. Although riparian areas ranked the highest, many riparian areas were captured within the Habitat data, so Habitat received a weighting of .3 and Riparian received a weighting of .2. Agriculture received a weighting of .3 because it is linked to protection of surface water rights, which received a high level of support in the survey. Scenic received a lower weighting of .2 to reflect the lower priority placed on it by county residents.

This model was then used to produce a composite raster map (a raster is a grid of cells and a composite of multiple raster layers). This map shows the areas within the county that contain the highest concentration of conservation values (see Conservation Priorities Map). For example, areas that contain a river, a rare plant species, and provide habitat for an economically important species, such as elk, will score higher (and look darker) than areas which only contain rare plant species.

Parcel data was then overlaid on this map, to determine which properties should be the highest priority for conservation (for privacy purposes, this parcel map is not shown). The priority property matrix ranks each identified property by showing which conservation values the property possesses and the quantity or quality of that conservation value within the entire parcel. Additionally, the matrix considers two different values not included in the spatial analysis: 1) the size of the property (is it a significant intact parcel?) and 2) does the property provide a buffer to adjacent public land or private protected land. For each conservation value, the property was given a score of low (1 point), medium (3 points), or high (5 points). Each property was then given an overall conservation score. Each property is described here. Inclusion in this plan does NOT imply that any action will be taken by any public entity – not the County or any federal agency. Rather, it simply suggests that this is where partner entities may focus their outreach efforts. If a landowner is interested in any voluntary conservation options and requests funding, this is a tool with which the County or any potential funders may evaluate the project and see its context within all potential conservation projects.

## ***PRIORITY PROJECTS FOR PRIVATE CONSERVATION (CONSERVATION EASEMENTS)***

### **VARA STRIPS (EXTENSIONES) ASSOCIATED WITH ACEQUIAS**

Vara strips are the often long and narrow parcels of land that run perpendicular to the acequia ditches; because of



the small acreage and large number of parcels, these parcels have not been ranked individually, but collectively, varas are a very high priority for protection.

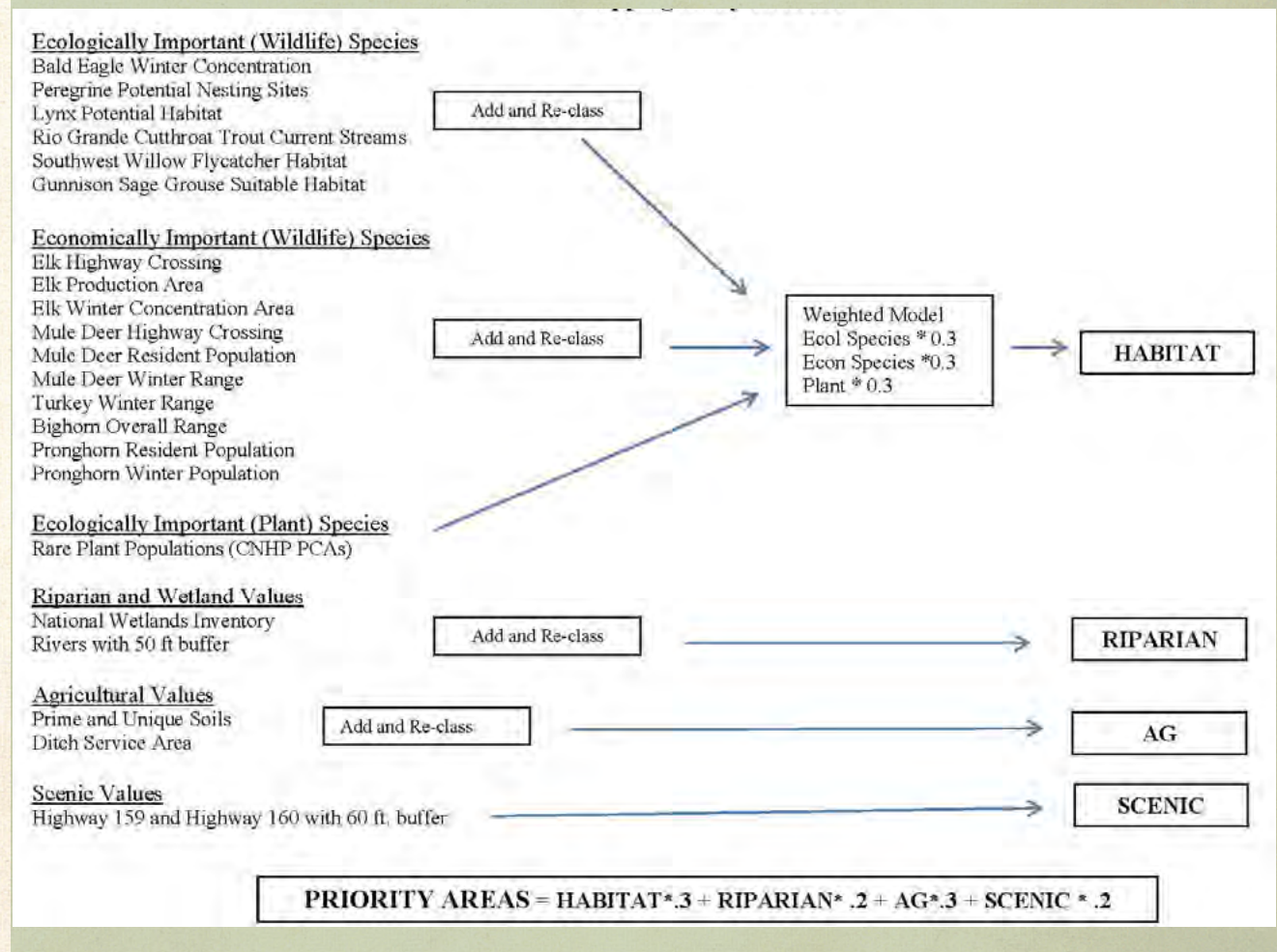
**Conservation Values:** Despite the fact that they are agricultural parcels, and thus not entirely natural lands, varas mimic natural systems and support outstanding wildlife and ecological values. Because they utilize gravity-fed irrigation systems, these lands tend to follow natural contours, in contrast with most pivot-irrigated farms which need to be flattened for the sprinklers to work effectively. Additionally, because the majority of the ditches are unlined, they often create riparian habitat that mirrors the natural waterways and provide important return flows to the shallow aquifer. Additionally, many of the vara strips are located in areas with very rich soils that have been identified as prime or as having statewide significance. Finally, the surface water rights used to irrigate the varas

are some of the oldest in the state and therefore are under pressure for use as augmentation.

At the time of this plan, the challenge in using conservation easements to protect these lands and water rights is parcel size, with conservation easement costs being prohibitive relative to the monetary value and appraised value of the conservation easement. Currently, the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association is working to explore other means of strengthening the water rights of acequias.

**Acreage:** 12,000 acres

## PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREAS MAPPING ANALYSIS MODEL



## **BLANCA PARCEL OF THE TRINCHERA RANCH**

The Trinchera Ranch is comprised of two very large parcels, which are not contiguous. The southern portion of the ranch was protected with a conservation easement held by Colorado Open Lands. In June, 2012, the owner of the Trinchera Ranch committed to donating a conservation easement on the Blanca Parcel of the Trinchera Ranch to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, if the proposed Sangre de Cristo Conservation Area is approved.

**Conservation Values:** The conservation values on the northern part of the ranch (known as the Blanca parcel) are quite extraordinary. The Property includes spectacular mountains, including the ridge line and substantial portions of Little Bear Peak, Blanca Peak, the Sierra Massif, and Mount Lindsey. The Property offers spectacular views of snow-capped peaks, vast expanses of conifer forest interspersed in autumn with golden aspen and cottonwoods, and broad river valleys of grasses and piñon-juniper. The Property's size and visual dominance make it the local and regional landscape.

The Property's size, elevation, and climate create a rich diversity of ecotypes. Subalpine Forest, Aspen, Piñon-Juniper and Sagebrush are dominant ecosystems. Alpine, Douglas Fir, Lodgepole Pine, Gambel Oak, High Elevation Riparian and Cottonwood Riparian ecosystems are also present. Alpine lakes, including the Winchell Lakes, are located on the ranch, including Ute Creek, Cottonwood Creek, Sangre de Cristo Creek and their tributaries. The size, diversity and defensibility of these ecosystems offers excellent habitat for a variety of plants, fish, and wildlife.

As noted, much of the Property consists of a variety of forest types, the most abundant being the Spruce-Fir and Ponderosa Pine-Douglas Fir. The forest cover ranges from young stands to stands in full maturity and decline. The Alpine vegetative community is very healthy and virtually unaltered. Portions of the Sagebrush, Piñon-Juniper and low elevation Riparian ecosystems contain a diversity of grass, forbs and other browse species. The Property is well-irrigated, including irrigated meadows covering a significant amount of acres, producing predominantly brome, orchard grass, timothy and alfalfa. Current grass and sage management promote a visually diverse and lush viewscape.

In addition to the variety of timber and vegetation present, wildlife is also abundant. Major species inhabiting the Property include elk, mule deer, black bear, bighorn sheep, bald and golden eagle, rainbow, brook, cutthroat and

brown trout, turkey, geese, band-tailed pigeon, snowshoe hare, cottontail and jack rabbit, mountain lion and coyote.

**Acreage:** 88,000 acres

## **KESTER FARMS**

**Conservation Values:** Kester Farms consists of several parcels just to the south and west of Fort Garland. The farms provide habitat for bald eagles and serve as potential habitat for Southwest Willow flycatcher. The property encompasses elk and mule deer highway crossings and is home to a resident mule deer population. It also contains part of a Potential Habitat Area designated by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program and contains a significant portion of riparian area and a small amount of wetlands near the Smith Reservoir. The farms contain some prime soils and have significant surface water rights. The Kester properties provide quite a bit of frontage to the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway and some of the parcels are adjacent to the Smith Reservoir, providing an important buffer. The protection of all parcels offers an opportunity for landscape-level conservation.

**Acreage:** 2,300 acres

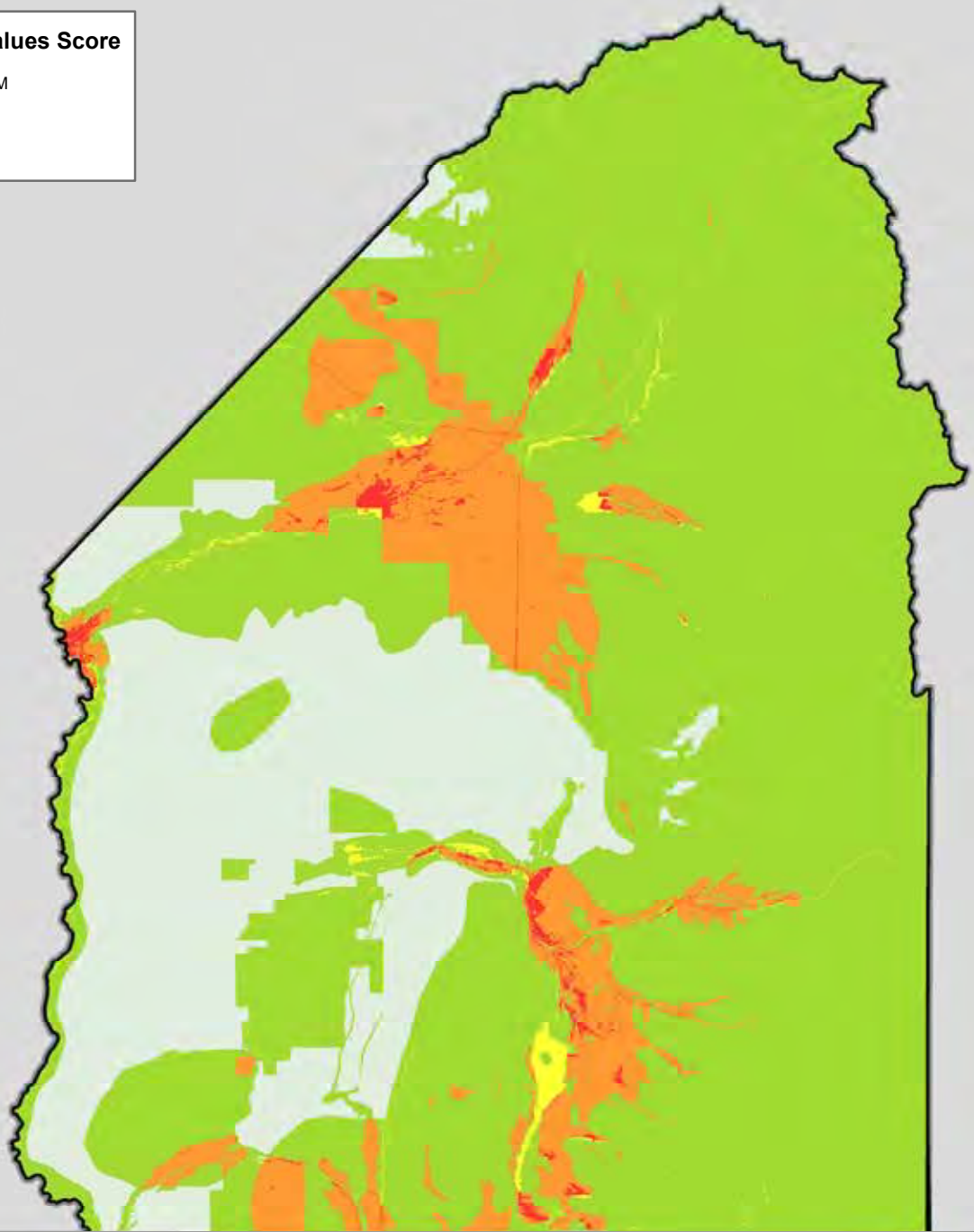
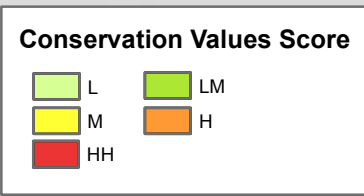
## **DOS HERMANOS RANCH (APPROXIMATELY 6,000)**

**Conservation Values:** The Dos Hermanos Ranch is a very large parcel which offers an opportunity for large-scale protection in the south-central portion of the county. The ranch provides critical winter habitat for mule deer and contains a portion of a resident mule deer population. The property provides potential habitat for lynx and Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The majority of the property contains a Potential Habitat Area designated by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Aside from its natural conservation values, the ranch is visible from Highway 159, just before it enters New Mexico and it contains prime irrigated soils, supporting Costilla County's agricultural economy. Finally, the ranch provides an important buffer to privately protected lands.

**Acreage:** 6,000 acres

## **MEADOWLARK RANCH/SAN LUIS HILLS FARM**

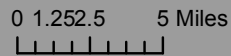
**Conservation Values:** The Meadowlark Ranch and San Luis Hills Farm were purchased by a single owner in 2010 and together, they are the largest undivided property on the



**Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan**

**Conservation Priority Analysis Map**

Data Sources: Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), US Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS), Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP), Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)



valley floor. The Meadowlark Ranch contains approximately 5 miles of the Rio Grande River. Consequently, the western property boundary is within the Rio Grande Natural Area. The Meadowlark also contains significant wetlands as the Trinchera Creek flows through the property and into the Rio Grande. The property provides bald eagle habitat and a portion of it provides habitat for a resident mule deer population. It serves as potential habitat for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher. It contains the largest block of irrigated circles in the County and a portion of that farmland is prime soil.

**Acreage:** approximately 18,800 acres

### **COLUMBIAN RANCH/ROCKY MOUNTAIN FARM (FAUCETTE FARM)**

**Conservation Values:** This farm, purchased by the Faucette family in the late 1990s is a certified organic farm comprised of 18 center pivot circles with significant prime irrigated soils and sagebrush habitat edges. It provides open viewshed of agricultural lands on both sides of the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway and provides extremely important winter range for one of Colorado's largest elk herds (leased for forage by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife). The farm contains a segment of the Old Spanish Trail National Historic Trail.

The landowner is willing to provide opportunities to link land conservation and stewardship with agricultural education and outreach; he is interested in getting students and other farmers in the field.

**Acreage:** 3,400 acres

### **PINEY VALLEY TRUST RANCH**

**Conservation Values:** This ranch is another one of the incredibly large properties that contains approximately 4 miles of the Rio Grande River and managed to escape subdivision to date. The property provides excellent winter range for pronghorn and provides a portion of the habitat for a resident mule deer population and potential habitat for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher. This property is a high priority for protection as it provides a unique opportunity for very large scale protection and buffers BLM land on the other side of the Rio Grande. Like the Meadowlark Ranch, western property boundary is within the Rio Grande Natural Area.

**Acreage:** 14,000 acres



*Faucette Farm looking towards Blanca Peak (© Sarah Parmar)*

## GRIMWOOD FARMS

**Conservation Values:** The farms provide habitat for bald eagle, a resident mule deer population, pronghorn winter range, and potential habitat for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher. The farm is irrigated with significant prime soils and would buffer an existing conservation easement.

**Acreage:** 600 acres

## MACKINNON PROPERTY

**Conservation Values:** The MacKinnon property is significant in terms of size and contains wetlands. The property is mapped habitat for Lynx, suitable habitat for Gunnison Sage Grouse, and a large portion of the property provides winter range for both mule deer and pronghorn.

**Acreage:** 3,800 acres

## WEST FARMS

**Conservation Values:** West farms is located on the southern boundary of the county and is bisected by a string of wetlands. The farm contains an elk winter concentration area and provides habitat for a resident pronghorn population. The farm is irrigated and has prime soils.

**Acreage:** 1,800 acres

## KUNUGI FARMS

**Conservation Values:** Parts of the farm are adjacent to both Highways 159 and 160, which not only provides a buffer to the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway, but also provides open areas for two documented crossing points for elk and deer. The farm also contains significant soils of statewide importance.

**Acreage:** 1,500 acres

## SKINKLE FARMS

**Conservation Values:** The Skinkle properties contain habitat for the Southwest Willow Flycatcher and provide habitat for a resident mule deer population. The farms contain some prime soils and a portion of the farm is adjacent to the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway.

**Acreage:** 1,300 acres

## NAKASAWA PROPERTY

**Conservation Values:** This farm is highly visible from the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway and contains some prime soils. The size of this parcel makes it attractive for a conservation easement.

**Acreage:** 2,130 acres

## *CONSERVATION FUNDING SOURCES*

### **Great Outdoors Colorado – Open Space Program**

This program provides funds to local governments and eligible nonprofit entities to acquire conservation easements on parcels of land that provide significant benefit to the state. This is a competitive source and those projects with multiple strong conservation values that rise to the level of regional and statewide significance have the best chance of success. GOCO is willing to be the “first funder” in a project but requires a 25% identified cash match.

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

NRCS has three programs that offer funding for conservation easements: Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). The first (WRP) is a program designed to protect wetlands and other riparian areas. Aside from quiet enjoyment to the property, many other property uses are restricted by easement under this program. The easement must be held by NRCS, but may be for a limited term. GRP easements may also be for a limited term and are meant to protect working grassland properties. Under the FRPP, landowners must have matching funds in hand, but may work with other entities such as land trusts. Lands must contain at least 20% prime or unique soils to qualify as ranchland and 50% prime or unique soils to qualify as farmland. Under this program, a land trust may actually hold the conservation easement.

### **Colorado Parks and Wildlife – Colorado Wildlife Habitat Protection Program**

Colorado’s Wildlife Habitat Protection Program is designed to accept proposals from private property owners, local government open space programs, land trusts or other conservation organizations that address one or more of the following priorities (in no particular order): Sage-grouse and lesser prairie-chicken habitat; parcels that provide

public recreational access themselves or otherwise increase access to public hunting and/or fishing opportunities; riparian areas that connect important protected habitats (protected habitats may include State Wildlife Areas; other Conservation Easements on private property; BLM or U.S. Forest Service lands); big game winter range and migration corridors.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service**

If the proposed San Luis Valley Conservation Area is approved by the Department of the Interior, the US Fish and Wildlife Service can apply for funding to acquire conservation easements to protect habitat of key threatened and endangered species identified in the conservation area plan. These conservation easements would be held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **North American Wetlands Conservation Act**

The U. S. Standard Grants Program is a competitive, matching grants program that supports public-private partnerships carrying out projects in the United States that further the goals of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. These projects must involve long-term protection, restoration, and/or enhancement of wetlands and associated uplands habitats for the benefit of all wetlands-associated migratory birds.

## COSTILLA COUNTY CONSERVATION PRIORITY MATRIX

Priority Parcel Evaluation Matrix Scoring: Low (1 point) Medium (3 points) High (5 points)	Habitat for Ecologically Important Species										Habitat for Economically Important Species										Habitat for Rare Plant Species										Riparian and Wetland Values										Agricultural Values										Scenic Values										Potential for landscape scale conservation										Overall Conservation Score									
	Bald Eagle	Peregrine	Lynx	Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout	SW Willow Flycatcher	Gunnison Sage Grouse	Elk Highway Crossing	Elk Production Area	Elk Winter Concentration Area	Mule Deer Highway Crossing	Mule Deer Resident Population	Mule Deer Winter Range	Turkey Winter Range	Big Horn Overall Range	Pronghorn Resident Population	Pronghorn Winter Range	Contains rare plant species	Contains habitat designated by CNHP	Riparian and Wetland Values	Contains portion of river, creek	Contains wetlands	Agricultural Values	Contains prime and unique soils	Acequia or Ditch service area	Scenic Values	Adjacent to Highway 159 or 160	Potential for landscape scale conservation	Large parcel size	Buffer to private conserved land or public land	Overall Conservation Score																																																		
Blanca Parcel, Trinchera Ranch	3	0	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	3	1	0	0	5	3	5	5	5	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	80																																																			
Kester Farms	5	0	0	0	5	0	5	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	0	1	3	5	5	5	5	46																																																				
Dos Hermanos Ranch	1	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	1	3	3	3	0	0	5	5	44																																																				
Meadowlark Ranch	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	5	5	0	3	0	0	5	5	37																																																				
Columbia n Ranch/Rocky Mtn Farm	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	3	5	5	5	0	34																																																				
Piney Valley Trust (Blue Bonnet Ranch?)	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	5	5	29																																																				
Grimwood Farms	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	1	3	28																																																				
MacKinnon	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	5	0	26																																																				
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Kunugi Farms	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	1	0	19																																																				
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Nakasawa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	5	5	0	12																																																				
San Luis Hills Farm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	10																																																				
Smith/Wakasugi Farms																																																																																
Vara strips*																																																																																

\*Vara strips or extensiones are associated with the acequia system and there are hundreds of vara strips that have been owned by the same families since the establishment of the Sangre de Cristo land grant. These lands are a high priority for conservation and their conservation values are generally described in the Priority Projects for Private Land Conservation section; however, because there are so many unique parcels of small size, they are not ranked in this matrix.



## Park Assessments & Recommendations

### PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Parks and other indoor/outdoor recreational facilities are an essential resource for families to safely enjoy in their neighborhoods. Studies show that communities with parks increase their appeal and the quality of life for community residents. Recreational facilities vary from small neighborhood parks to larger open space parks, community centers, and even memorial parks that offer residents and visitors space for reflection. They can be managed by a sole entity or by a variety of community organizations and local government entities. Costilla County has a variety of recreational resources that offer a variety of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors however, existing resources are under utilized or require small to large repairs and improvements. Currently, Costilla County provides visitors and residents access to recreational amenities for overnight camping, fishing, picnic areas, access to hiking trails, and indoor sports such as basketball, volleyball, and swimming. Neighborhood park amenities range from playground equipment, open fields for outdoor sports, outdoor recreational courts, picnic areas, and walking paths. Some parks are maintained on a routine basis in partnership with local organizations while others have been neglected.

With the guidance of the National Park Service, the county developed a series of public surveys and organized public forums to hear community concerns and ideas for increasing use of park resources and identifying new ideas for recreational amenities. During a series of community meetings, the residents and visitors of Costilla County were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on what they would like to see improved and/or developed. During the first set of meetings in April 2011 in Fort Garland and San Luis, members of the community were asked to rank their top three choices for “types of parks and recreation facilities that they are most interested in seeing developed/further

improved”. There was strong support for developing a Community Center followed by improving and/or further developing community parks and neighborhood parks. They voiced concerns of not having available resources for the younger residents and the elder community to enjoy. Responses were mainly focused on enhancing already existing park resources while also creating physical links to schools, community centers, and other parks.

Another survey was mailed to all county residents in August 2011 to further identify what priorities they were interested in the county working towards. The surveys revealed that residents of the county are interested in enhancing facilities at the Rito Seco Park, Stabilization Park, Sanchez and Smith Reservoirs, and developing a community center in the Town of San Luis Park. Most importantly, the community would support projects that are partially funded and that share responsibilities between the county and other community partners in maintenance and improvements of facilities.

The ideas developed by county residents and visitors were integral to the identification of park improvements and development of new facilities. The following section outlines the county’s current inventory of park resources, provides recommendations for improvements and development of recreational amenities. The county recognizes that these improvements and development of new facilities should be satisfied with the help of partnerships and funding, therefore, a list of funding sources and partnerships is also included in this section. In summary, the county strongly believes that investing in recreational resources that interest residents and visitors will increase the use of these parks by area residents who have little to no alternatives for outdoor or indoor recreation.



## **RITO SECO PARK**

Rito Seco Park is located within the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Area at the dead end of Rito Seco Road in the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision. It is one of a few park resources that offer visitors overnight amenities for camping and picnicking. The park is nestled within shaded piñon, juniper, aspen and ponderosa pine forests adjacent to Rito Seco Creek. Its secluded location and unique natural environment make it a popular location for a variety of recreational users.

### ***PARK AMENITIES:***

- 5 BBQ facilities (with informal fire rings)
- 21 Picnic tables
- Creek Access
- Campground sites
- Trails and connections at end of road across creek
- One Restroom facility for men and women

### ***ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS:***

There is no road signage on Hwy 159 or within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision directing visitors to the park. With the lack of signage the destination is difficult to find by public users. There is no safety or informational signage within the park identifying acceptable recreational uses or approved rules and regulations. This lack of signage invites a variety of incompatible uses. The restroom facilities aren't maintained and are suffering from neglect. The lack of public facilities on-site means an increase in unsanitary conditions and litter. The lack of trash receptacles means that there is large amount of trash collecting along the creek and within the parking lot and camping areas. There are safety concerns with BBQ facilities that were disassembled, covered with concrete, or replaced with informal fire rings. The lack of designated trails means an increase in informal trails that may not be compatible within sensitive areas along the creek. The picnic tables and public restroom suffer from vandalism such as graffiti. Some access points to the creek are steep and multiple areas along the creek suffer from erosion as a result of users creating new access points.

### ***OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:***

An investment in road signage along Hwy 159 and at major intersections within the subdivision directing visitors to the park would increase visitation and appreciation of one of a few outdoor recreational resources that residents and visitors could safely enjoy. Informational and interpretive signage directing visitors how to safely utilize the park would help decrease incompatible recreational activities. The county should consider replacing the existing restroom facility with a compost toilet and place trash containers near the restroom facility and by picnic tables. To enhance recreational facilities along the creek, the county should invest in safe access points such as fishing docks or surface grading along embankments. The county could request the assistance of the Southwest Conservation Corps to disassemble illegal campsites and fire pits. The county should consider applying for grants that can financially assist with developing tent pads, informational signage, and new picnic tables. With the help of the National Park Service, identify clear trail routes that are within the county owned boundaries for historical uses for wood gathering. The County Road and Bridge Department could employ seasonal help to maintain the facilities during high



*Rito Seco Park*

visitation in the summer and hunting seasons. Since the park is located within a unique natural environment, it offers local school districts and non-profit organizations an opportunity for outdoor educational programs. In partnership with local school districts, an educational curriculum could be developed to fit within lesson plans to meet Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) standards.

### **Funding Sources:**

Directional and Informational Signage: Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, American Trails Association;

Tent pads, picnic tables, BBQ facilities: GOCO, private donations

Restroom facilities and trash cans: Costilla County, American Trails Association

Creek Access: Division of Parks and Wildlife

### **Partnerships:**

National Park Service, GOCO, Colorado Open Lands, Centennial School District, Costilla County Road and Bridge Department, Southwest Conservation Corps, Sierra Grande School District, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife

## **VETERANS PARK**

The Veterans Park, erected in 2007, serves as a memorial to county residents who served in the Armed Forces. The park is managed by the county in partnership with the American Legion. The park offers county residents and visitors an opportunity to walk along a paved sidewalk to the memorial and a viewing area to a T33A Shooting Star jet aircraft on loan by the U.S. Air Force. The park's landscape is well-maintained with colorful plants and flowers surrounded by a backdrop of flags and native trees. The memorial and airplane are well lit at night and visible from Hwy. 160. With its close proximity to Hwy. 160, this park also offers visitors driving through an opportunity to experience a memorial that is a source of pride for the county.

### ***PARK AMENITIES:***

- Memorial honoring Armed Forces Veterans from Costilla County
- Parking lot

- Accessible paved walking paths
- U.S. Air Force T-33 Shooting Star
- Five Flag poles and flags

### ***ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS:***

The park is maintained by the County Road and Bridge Department and the local American Legion. Though landscape improvements are needed, one major concern is the lack of trash receptacles at the parking lot and the lack of signage along Hwy 160 to direct traffic to the park.

### ***OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:***

The county should provide one trash receptacle at the parking to avoid the site being littered. In partnership with the American Legion, the County Road and Bridge Department maintains a sprinkler system for the surrounding landscape. The American Legion hosts a Family Day at the park the first weekend in August. The County, the Legion and the VFW could consider Veterans Day, or Memorial Day events at the park, as the county hosts no other events for these holidays. The American Legion, the VFW and the county can also work with the Department of Transportation to identify proper directional signage from Highway 160 to the park.

**Funding Sources:** Grants from state and federal Veterans Offices and fundraising by local Veterans Organizations

**Partnerships:** Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Costilla County Road and Bridge, American Legion and VFW and Sierra Grande School District

## **TOWN OF FORT GARLAND NEIGHBORHOOD PARK (AKA LEVI AND HELEN GONZALEZ PARK)**

The Town of Fort Garland Neighborhood Park offers a variety of outdoor recreational activities for the local community of Fort Garland to utilize. Half of the park is an open field offering space for a variety of outdoor sports such as soccer, baseball, football, and Frisbee, to name a few. The other half of the park offers space for passive recreation, as well as a playground and a full size basketball court. The park is surrounded by shade trees and a landscaped lawn with shrubs and flowers at the entrance of the park. The park is located adjacent to the Holy Family Catholic



*Veterans Park*

Church within a residential neighborhood making it a very visible and utilized park. A partnership between the Fort Garland Revitalization Committee and Costilla County maintains the park.

### ***PARK AMENITIES***

- A full size basketball court
- Open Field
- Playground equipment with 12 pieces of new equipment (plastic and metal materials) including 8 swings and 2 larger equipment pieces with slides and climbing bars and 2 older pieces of equipment;
- 1 pavilion with 6 picnic tables
- 3 covered picnic areas with 1 table at each picnic area on concrete slabs with grills
- 1 shaded picnic table; 2 non-shaded picnic tables
- 3 wooden benches
- 3 outdoor BBQ grills
- Memorial at entrance signs

### ***ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS***

The park landscape is well-maintained and it has recently received a GOCO grant for the development of a covered pavilion. However, the paint on the picnic tables is chipping and the wood is splintering.

There is evidence of vandalism on the bottom of the playground slides. The basketball court is experiencing neglect and there is evidence of cracks in the foundation and grass growing through the cracks. Park signage needs to be more visible and clearly state the hours of operations and park restrictions.

### ***OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:***

The park's location provides an opportunity for a trail/walking path connecting the residential community to the Safe Routes to School walking path located along Hwy. 160. Minor renovations to the pavilion and picnic areas are low cost and therefore a top priority amongst the list of recommendations. Supplies and labor can be provided by the County Road and Bridge staff maintaining the park. High school students participating in the Southwest

Conservation Corps (SCC) Costilla County Day Crew Program could lend a hand with some of the minor park improvements. The resurfacing of the basketball court and replacing the hoops and basket are also of top priority. Repairs to the court will significantly increase the safety of players utilizing the court. Also, the county should look to its partners for donations of supplies and labor or work with non-profit community groups to organize fundraising events to pay for park improvements. The county should continue to maintain the landscaping and trash removal at the park.

**Funding Sources:**

Pavilion and picnic area improvements: Southwest Conservation Corp Day Crew Members, Costilla County Road and Bridge Department, Fort Garland Revitalization Committee

Basketball Court repairs: Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Costilla County Road and Bridge Department

Trail connecting residential community to Safe Routes to School Walking Path: Safe Routes to School

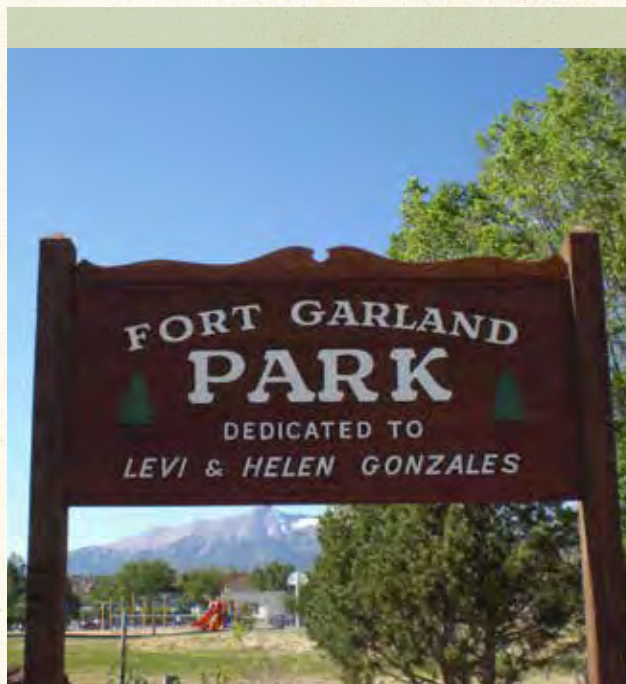
**Partnerships:** Sierra Grande School District, Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Southwest Conservation Corps, Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center, Costilla County Road and Bridge Department

**TOWN OF SAN LUIS PARK**

In cooperation with the Town of San Luis, the county is interested in improving areas of the Town of San Luis Park that are of interest to the community and the Town Council. There have been past efforts to improve landscaping and existing recreational amenities while also developing a community center in the abandoned old school gym located within the park boundaries. (See Proposed/Potential Community Center section at the end of this chapter for more information.) The Town of San Luis Park is owned and managed by the Town. The county is interested in continuing to partner to resurrect a communal space of importance to San Luis and other county residents.

***PARK AMENITIES:***

- Shaded trees, sparse shrubs and grass
- Parking lot



*Fort Garland Park*

- Full court concrete basketball court with 2 hoops and 1 net
- 1 play area with 3 rocking horses, 1 swing set with 6 swings
- Sidewalk leading to old gym and play area and basketball court
- 7 park benches
- 2 yellow picnic tables
- 2 trash cans with lids and trash bags
- Flag pole (no flag)
- Old gym
- Bell tower

***ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS***

Some of the park amenities are deteriorating which makes it difficult for residents to safely use the park. The park benches located in the park have chipped paint and unstable seats or no seats at all. One of the two picnic tables is missing parts and therefore not functional. Small amounts of litter around the perimeter of the park were noticeable. The old gym and bell tower pose the biggest safety concerns since there are broken windows that are partially boarded up. This increases the risk of animals inhabiting the structure and causing deterioration and irreversible damage.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In cooperation with the Town of San Luis, the county can apply for GOCO grants to purchase picnic tables, benches, and upgrade the playground equipment to include a shade structure. Through community partnerships, the town and county can organize park clean-up days and landscaping days to improve the landscape. The town and county can seek donations for seeds, trees, and other vegetative cover to beautify the park. The following amenities should be taken into consideration when applying for grants to beautify and improve the landscape of the park:

- Gazebo
- Outdoor stage for musical events and other performances

**Funding Sources:** GOCO, donations from non-profit community organizations

**Partnerships:** Sembrando Semillas, Costilla County, Centennial School

## **TOWN OF BLANCA NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

The Town of Blanca Neighborhood Park offers passive open space and a limited amount of recreational activities. Within the passive open space, there is a combination of shade trees and grass with four park benches around the perimeter of the park. The other half of the park is designated for a basketball court and playground area. The park serves the community of Blanca and is situated adjacent to an alley off of 7th and Broadway in a residential area next to a local church. The landscaping within the passive open space is well maintained while the playground area and basketball court are in need of minor repairs to ensure safety for park visitors. The park is managed and maintained by the Town of Blanca.

## **PARK AMENITIES:**

- One full size basketball court
- Playground with 9 pieces of equipment including 2 metal slides; monkey bars; merry-go-round, see-saw, and 4 swings.
- 4 park benches (2 shaded)
- 1 covered picnic area with 2 picnic tables
- 3 trash cans with lids

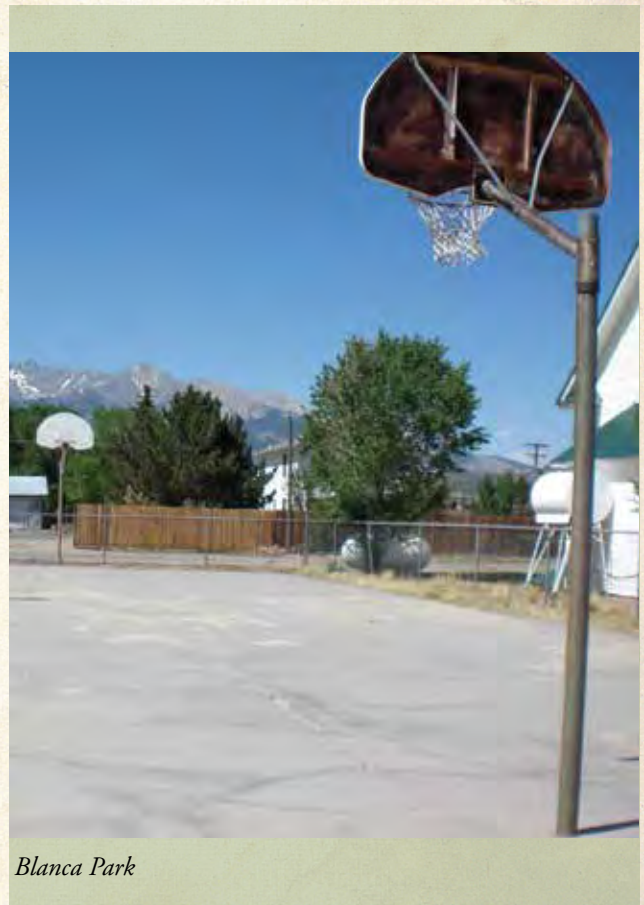
- 5 large oak trees
- Park signage

## **ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS**

Improvements to the basketball court and playground equipment are recommended to ensure health and safety of park visitors. The concrete basketball court is cracked and uneven and is missing nets around the hoops. The metal slides and merry-go-round have rusted hardware and visible bent parts on the slide stairs or graffiti under the slide. The paint on the see-saw is chipped and requires a new paint finish to withstand the sun exposure. Though there were trash cans with trash bags and lids available for visitors to dispose of litter, the trash cans were overflowing and small amounts of litter were present around the perimeter of the park.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The park's location, central to the local church and residential community of Blanca, as well as the well-



*Blanca Park*

maintained passive open space area and picnic areas, provide many opportunities for safe community gatherings. Trail connections could be created as safe routes to other points of interest within the Town of Blanca or the surrounding community of Fort Garland. Investing in minor improvements to make the playground safer and providing a shade structure upon completion of minor improvements could ensure the playground equipment's longevity. Working with community members who have knowledge in concrete slab work to resurface the basketball court will ensure the safety of park visitors.

**Funding Sources:**

Playground improvements: Shade Structure Grant by the American Academy of Dermatology;

Basketball court resurfacing repairs: Complete an assessment of all cracks before determining which treatment to consider. The costs for repair vary greatly and will therefore affect which grants or fundraising techniques to select. Consider fundraising techniques or community events.

**Partnerships:**

Town of Blanca, Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center, Blanca Community Church, Sierra Grande School District, Costilla County Road and Bridge Department

**OLD HEADSTART PLAYGROUND**

Located immediately east of the county office building on Gaspar Street is the Old Headstart Playground. The area is owned and maintained by the county. The area is fenced with well-maintained grass. The playground equipment on site includes six swings, five spring animals, a metal slide and monkey bars. This area is used by children in the community and the county has received comments from parents and grandparents that they like the area because of the well maintained grass field and the fencing provides security that children will not be able to easily wander off into adjacent streets and parking lots. Another comment from residents is that they would like to see the metal playground equipment upgraded because the slides, monkey bars and swings get very hot in the summer months. The county should consider a funding proposal to Great Outdoors Colorado, or other appropriate foundations and agencies to upgrade existing playground equipment and add additional equipment stations, shade pavilions, or picnic tables due to the large amount of unused space within the fenced grass field.

**FORT GARLAND ENTRADA VISITORS CENTER**

At the southwest corner of the intersection of state highways 160 and 159 is the Fort Garland Entrada Visitors Center. The building and property are owned by the county and managed through a partnership with the Fort Garland



*Old Headstart Playground*



*Fort Garland Entrada Visitors Center*

Revitalization Committee. The well maintained building includes men's and woman's restrooms, information on local attractions and events and free coffee and is staffed by volunteers of the Revitalization Committee. The building's grounds include six large flower pots, a wood pavilion with picnic table and an additional table and bench. A very large and attractive sign just off the intersection to the highways advertises the Visitors Center and gives directions to the Fort Garland Museum, the town of San Luis and Taos, New Mexico. The Fort Garland Revitalization Committee has expressed an interest in working with the county to pursue funding for an improved parking lot, additional landscaping in the area and the development of walkways in and around the building and grounds. The Committee has had some preliminary drawings of concepts for these improvements. The Colorado Garden Show, Inc. provides grants for landscaping projects.

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## **PROPOSED PARKS**

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### **OUTDOOR FITNESS AND EXERCISE PARK**

The Costilla County Public Health Agency is proposing a grant funded park project for an Outdoor Fitness and Exercise Park to be located in the courtyard of the county's Health and Human Services building on Main Street in San Luis. The proposed park would have at least six fitness stations. Each fitness area would be covered by a pavilion.

The proposed idea also includes a picnic table with a pavilion as well as a concrete sidewalk through the middle of the park. Trees and shrubs would be landscaped and artificial turf would be installed in open areas surrounding the fitness equipment, benches and picnic tables. Outdoor lighting will also be installed. This project is being proposed in order to provide more options for people in the community to stay active and healthy.

Due to the local and national trend of increased rates of obesity and its associated health problems, it is important to provide the community with a way to decrease these rates as well as to prevent other diseases and health conditions. This park proposal is unique because it will be the only outdoor fitness center in the county. Currently the southern part of Costilla County does not have a recreation center to utilize and there are very few recreation and outdoor fitness opportunities available in the county.

Currently the residents of southern Costilla County have to travel approximately 20 miles to use the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center and pay a usage fee for any type of organized and social exercise and fitness activities. The nearest private health clubs and gyms are in Alamosa County which is over 40 miles away for residents in the San Luis area. Creating an outdoor fitness center and exercise park is an opportunity to expand fitness and recreation opportunities to residents by creating a new high quality and user friendly park centrally located in the town of San Luis.



*Exercise Park*

Costilla County has a diagnosed diabetes rate of 13.3%, compared to Colorado's rate of 5.6% and an obesity rate of 25.4%, compared to Colorado's rate of 20.1%. The percentage of people overweight in Costilla County is 41.0% compared with 36.4% for Colorado. These statistics are from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. The outdoor fitness center and exercise park is an opportunity to incorporate the health and fitness needs of different segments of the population that has a growing need for exercise and activity.

### **RIO GRANDE GREENBELT PARK**

Costilla County has 862 acres of deeded land along the Rio Grande corridor beginning just south of Highway 142 within the Rio Grande Ranchos subdivision. The Greenbelt is characterized by two distinct areas. The northern half has canyons and cliff walls and creates dramatic scenery. The southern half has gentle slopes of grass and shrubs extending to the riverbank. A jeep trail set back from the riverbank parallels the southern section. Rock art can be found within the Greenbelt. Much of the perimeter of the area has been fenced at one time and there are cattle guards at the northern and southern ends of the Greenbelt Area. No other amenities or signage is in the area.

Costilla County would like to explore more formal development of a county park for this area similar to what was developed in the Rito Seco Park. Signage, designated parking areas and picnic tables are potential first steps to improve the experience for the visitor at the park. Further development potential would include designated camping and fishing areas, a boat put-in and restrooms. The development of a hiking trail along the rim of the canyon in the northern half of the Greenbelt is also under consideration.

Community surveys that asked residents to prioritize potential projects and amenities for the proposed park ranked camping facilities as the number one priority for this area. A day use picnic area scored number two. Fishing access was number three followed by hiking trails as number four. Mountain bike trails and raft/kayak access ranked five and six. Other comments included cleaning and rehabilitating the area around the old rock dam and removing the old diversion structure as it has become a magnet for graffiti and littering.

In addition to developing the current 862-acres as a county park, the county would like to explore acquiring additional subdivision parcels adjacent to the current greenbelt to add acres of publicly accessible space in the area. The county is also interested in acquiring, or working with partners to preserve parcels of historical significance such as the de Vargas crossing site, areas with prominent rock art and other areas of archeological significance along the Rio Grande corridor. The county is also interested in pursuing acquisition, or securing a public easement for a proper boat/raft take-out in the box canyon area just north of the New Mexico state line. The county also has deeded open space areas on the north and south boundaries of the Rio Grande River Ranches subdivision just north of the Lobato Bridge. This subdivision contains ¼-acre lots and the county would like to pursue acquisition of lots adjacent to the open space to increase publicly accessible land in this area. Appendix 4 lists parcels numbers adjacent to county greenbelt space.







*Stabilization Reservoir*

## **STABILIZATION RESERVOIR**

The stabilization reservoir, fed by Culebra Canal, is located 4 miles southwest of San Luis on Hwy 159. It's a popular area for trout fishing. The park is maintained by the County Road and Bridge Department and leased by the CO Division of Parks and Wildlife from adjacent owners. It's a perfect example of collaborative partnerships offering recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

### **PARK AMENITIES:**

- Accessible shore for fishing
- 1 M/W restroom
- Gravel roads to access various points around the reservoir
- 9 picnic tables
- Trash can (seasonal)

### **ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS**

There are a few informal fire pits with litter. Since there are often no trash receptacles, the area has large amounts of litter around the exterior. The trash receptacles and restrooms are occasionally maintained by the county, but the area is heavily used and litter can accumulate in the area. The county should create a more formal maintenance schedule. It's unclear if overnight recreational uses are allowed. The lack of formal fire pits, trash cans, lighting, and signage are of concern.

### **OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Develop informational signage for visitors to understand acceptable recreational uses. There is a great potential for

trails traversing the reservoir boundaries to promote more hiking and less informal driving trails caused by vehicular traffic. Apply for grants to repair or replace picnic tables. Use volunteer work by the Southwest Conservation Corps Community Crews to create formal fire pits. The county should place this location on a routine maintenance schedule for trash and restroom maintenance.

### **Funding Sources:**

Informational signage and repair picnic tables: Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife

Trails development: National Park Service (complete trail design); American Trails Association

Create fire pits: Southwest Conservation Corps

### **Partnerships:**

National Park Service, Costilla County, Southwest Conservation Corps, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Sanchez Ditch and Reservoir Company

## **COSTILLA COUNTY RESERVOIRS - SMITH, SANCHEZ, AND MOUNTAIN HOME RESERVOIRS**

### **SMITH RESERVOIR**

Costilla County is fortunate to have a unique partnership with the CO Parks and Wildlife Division to lease and manage three reservoirs located in northern and southern Costilla County. The Smith Reservoir is located 5 miles outside of Blanca, off of Hwy 160 south on County Road 12. The location offers great views of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range and provides excellent trout fishing. The two boat ramps and the rules prohibiting waterskiing make this a perfect spot for fisherman. Public access is prohibited from February 15 through July 15 on the north and east shore areas. Fishing is prohibited from November 1 through the last day of waterfowl season except within 200 yards of the dam. Vehicles are prohibited within 50 feet of the water. Motorized and non-motorized boats are allowed as well as hunting and fishing.

### **AMENITIES:**

- 2 Boat Ramps
- Primitive Campsites

- Dump station
- 1 M/W Restroom
- Primitive roads around reservoir

### **ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS**

This reservoir's close proximity to Hwy. 160 makes it a popular destination for local trout fisherman. However, signage after the turn-off from Hwy. 160, make it difficult for visitors to locate. Signage within the reservoir doesn't clearly state the seasonal restrictions for public access and vehicle accessibility along the shores of the reservoir. Camping is allowed but there is no clear guidance on where the public can camp.

### **OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

With the potential for waterfowl viewing areas for bird enthusiasts when fishing is prohibited, the county can work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to obtain guidance on developing viewing docks or identifying access points for the best viewing areas. The county can work in collaboration with the Division of Parks and Wildlife and/or Southwest Conservation Corps to identify primitive campsites to reduce resource damage and increase overnight recreational amenities. The Division of Parks and Wildlife can provide clearer guidance on camping, fishing, and seasonal restrictions in more visible areas to avoid illegal activity.



*Smith Reservoir*

### **Funding Sources:**

Signage: CO Division of Parks and Wildlife;

Campgrounds: CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Southwest Conservation Corps

### **Partnerships:**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Southwest Conservation Corps, Costilla County

### **SANCHEZ RESERVOIR**

Sanchez reservoir is located a few miles south and east of San Luis. The reservoir is ideal for pike, perch, and walleye as well as boating, hiking, and camping, and wildlife viewing. All boats are allowed but waterskiing and bowfishing are prohibited. Campsites are allowed east of the boat ramp in designated areas and prohibited in the boat ramp parking area.

### **AMENITIES:**

- Boat ramp
- Primitive campsites
- M/W restroom

### **ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS**

There is no clear signage detailing restrictions and recreational opportunities. There are trails within the reservoir boundaries but there is no signage detailing length and use restrictions.

### **OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Work with the Division of Parks and Wildlife to update signage to include restrictions and all recreational opportunities. Continue to maintain restroom facilities to reduce litter and unsanitary conditions.

### **Funding Sources:**

CO Division of Parks and Wildlife

### **Partnerships:**

CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Costilla County



*Sanchez Reservoir*

## **MOUNTAIN HOME RESERVOIR**

### **AMENITIES:**

- Boat ramp
- M/W restroom
- Primitive campsites

### **ISSUES / CONSTRAINTS**

There is one directional sign to the reservoir which is misleading. There is no additional signage once you get into the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision to locate the entrance of the reservoir. There is no clear signage for recreational uses or clear locations of legal campgrounds.

### **OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Work with the Division of Parks and Wildlife to update signage to include restrictions and all recreational opportunities. Work with the Southwest Conservation Corps Community Crews to disassemble illegal campsites and develop safe primitive campgrounds. Continue to maintain restroom facilities to reduce litter and unsanitary conditions.

### **Funding Sources:**

CO Division of Parks and Wildlife

### **Partnerships:**

CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Costilla County, Southwest Conservation Corps

## **BLANCA/FORT GARLAND COMMUNITY CENTER**

The only community center with indoor recreational facilities is located just west of Fort Garland on State Highway 160. The Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center offers indoor courts and indoor pool plus classrooms and a library. Located adjacent to the Sierra Grande School District, the community center serves as a safe meeting place for students and their families. The center offers a few classes for pottery making, dance, and other classes depending on available instructors. Since it has affordable meeting room rentals, the community also utilizes this facility for private events. Its accessible by the Safe Routes to School trail that connects the community of Fort Garland to the school and community center.

### **AMENITIES:**

- Indoor pool
- Indoor Basketball court
- Recreational room with pool table
- Library
- Classrooms
- Weight Room

### **OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

With the assistance of community partnerships, the center can expand its schedule of fitness classes to provide indoor cardiovascular exercise classes for students and adults at a low rate for residents. Upgrading the weight room to include a variety of workout equipment could increase the visitation and provide a more comfortable atmosphere for a variety of fitness levels. The community center can also work in collaboration with Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve to organize after school educational programs offered at the center for students who participate in the center's after school program. The community center could also invest in marketing and advertisement to promote recreational opportunities at the center. The

center could also expand its class schedule to include more heritage based art classes.

**Funding Sources:**

Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, GOCO

**Partnerships:**

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Sierra Grande School District, Division of Parks and Wildlife, Costilla County

**CULEBRA COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER**

The recommendations listed below include and expand on past efforts identified by the Culebra Community Recreation Center, Inc. in 2002.

Reintroduce a Service Plan to construct, operate, and maintain a community recreation center for the southern communities of Costilla County utilizing the old gym and other open spaces within the Town of San Luis Park. This facility can consist of a gym, indoor swimming pool, weight room, exercise area, indoor track, kitchen, computer room, lobby, meeting rooms, related public and support facilities (offices, restrooms, storage rooms, maintenance facility rooms, etc.). This type of facility could support organized sports, fitness classes, and educational classes for all ages. This facility could provide connections to other areas of interest through safe sidewalks and a focus on connections to Sanchez Reservoir or the Greenbelt Area. Funding for the overall construction and operation of the center should be a decision made by tax payers, community members and the Town Council of San Luis.

The following summary for initial operations has been taken from the 2002 Culebra Community Recreation Center Inc. report submitted to the Board of County Commissioners. Notice that the construction of the facility will occur in phases:

- Land survey, soil tests, permits
- Engineering/Architectural Design Services
- Construction

Other fees to consider:

- Administrative fees
- Legal fees
- Schematic design fees



*Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center*

Expenditures to operate and maintain facility:

- Director
- Maintenance Employees
- Part-time staff (instructors, etc.)
- Building maintenance/supplies
- Organizing new activities, programs
- Maintaining pool/supplies
- Office expenses
- Utilities
- Security
- Insurance
- Legal fees
- Administrative (bookkeeping, payroll, etc.)

**Funding Sources:**

GOCO, El Pomar Foundation, Gates Foundation, Boettcher Foundation

The county and the town should come to an agreement on how to best use resources to construct, operate and maintain the facility.

**Partnerships:**

Centennial School District, Costilla County, Town of San Luis, Costilla County Economic Development Council



## Trails

### **TRAIL INVENTORY AND CONDITION**

Costilla County has only a few existing publicly accessible trails for residents and visitors to enjoy. These trails vary from one single track hiking trail within a greenbelt area to a few paved and graveled trails connecting communities to public spaces for work, play, and spiritual reflection.

In 2011 a trails, recreation and open space survey was distributed to county residents at various meetings, public events and public buildings and a comment card was sent to all box holders. This community survey process and survey questions identified the project ideas described in the master plan. Extending the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail and Fort Garland Safe Routes to School Trail were identified as the two highest community priorities for trail projects

### **SANGRE DE CRISTO GREENBELT TRAIL:**

Costilla County has one developed hiking trail in the county, the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail. This trail is located in the Greenbelt Open Space within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches subdivision. The trail is a little less than three miles long. Its northern terminus is along Balleroy Road about .75 miles east of Battersea Road and the southern terminus is a short distance south and east of the dead end of Hidalgo Road. It is unknown exactly when this trail was constructed though it appears to have been built sometime in the late 1970s, or early 1980s. There are two picnic benches at the Balleroy Road trailhead that are the same style as benches found in Rito Seco Park and at Stabilization Reservoir. There is no directional or interpretive signage at either trailhead.

The Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt trail received maintenance work from a Southwest Community Corps crew in 2006 along the northern half of the trail and from a Southwest Conservation Corps camping crew along the southern half of the trail in 2011. The Conservation Corps camping crew worked at the project site from October 17-25, 2011 and

camped at Rito Seco Park during the length of the project. The crew of nine consisted of three crew leaders and six crew members. A total of 660 project hours were worked on improving and maintaining the trail and cleaning up areas of Rito Seco Park. The crew constructed 78' of new trail and maintained 4,900' of existing trail. Ten rock steps were installed along the trail while seven switchbacks were maintained and an additional switchback was installed. Seven rock cairns were built to better identify the direction of the trail. Twelve bags of trash were collected from the park and trail area.



*Stations of the Cross Trail (© Sarah Parmar)*

Due to these maintenance activities, the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt trail is in good condition and easy to follow in most areas. The trail has numerous switchbacks and rock steps in several places. About halfway along the trail, the trail it gets a little difficult to follow along a grassy ridge top where the faint traces of a road have been established likely to access firewood.

### **STATIONS OF THE CROSS SHRINE TRAIL:**

There are two other public use trails in the county. The Stations of the Cross Shrine trail is a 1.4 mile trail starting near the intersection of Main Street and Colorado Highway 142 in San Luis. The Sangre de Cristo Parish Church, built in 1886, was instrumental in creating San Luis' main visitor attraction, the Stations of the Cross Shrine, as part of its centennial celebration in 1986.

The Stations of the Cross Shrine was conceived under the leadership of Father Patrick Valdez of the Sangre de Cristo Parish. The trail leads up to the Shrine along the mesa known as "La Mesa de la Piedad y de la Misericordia," or The Hill of Piety and Mercy. The Stations of the Cross are a series of graphic meditations of the last hours of Christ's life – His judgment, suffering and death. Included is the "Resurrection", the 15th Station. The creation of local

sculpture, Huberto Maestas, the Shrine consists of 2/3 life-size bronze sculptures.

"La Capilla de Todos Los Santos," The Chapel of All Saints, was built to compliment the Stations. The Capilla is a place for worship and a beautiful reflection of religious architecture and tradition. The trail and adjacent grounds are maintained by the Sangre de Cristo parish and the local Knights of Columbus. The trail and capilla are visited frequently by state, national, and international visitors. The trail and capilla are an example of the rich heritage that is preserved in the county.

### **FORT GARLAND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL WALKING PATH:**

The Fort Garland Safe Routes to School Walking Path is a one-mile paved path that runs parallel to Highway 160 and connects the town of Fort Garland to the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center and to the Sierra Grande School. It was constructed in 2003 through a collaboration with the Costilla County Commissioner's Office, the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center and the Colorado Department of Transportation. The trail is great example of linking local communities to public spaces such as community centers and schools.



*Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

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### PROPOSED PROJECT: ESTABLISHING THE RITO SECO PARK TRAIL SYSTEM

Rito Seco Park is located within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches subdivision. The road to access Rito Seco Park crosses the Rito Seco at the east end of the park just past the established campsites and picnic areas. Rito Seco Park does not have an official established trail system but a series of user-created trails that lead the user around various beaver ponds and access to the creek, but to no specific destination points. The current trail system east of the park has no established uses but it appears that some users access it for firewood cutting, hunting and recreational ATV use. You can access these trails upon crossing the creek. The trail branches to the north and south soon after the creek. The north branch of the trail passes old cabin ruins and generally follows the route of the Rito Seco. Seeps, springs and beaver dams are also prevalent within the area. This entire area is within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Greenbelt.

**Recommendation:** Although the terrain is steep and rugged in places, the trail can be extended to the Battenburg Meadows area staying on Greenbelt property the entire way.

**Strategies:** The County could utilize the expertise of the Southwest Conservation Corps Los Valles District and Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve to identify trail maintenance needs and lay out a trail system that protects natural resources and considers the historical uses of the spurs along the trails. Mapping technologies will be used when conducting field surveys and will be distributed to the county for use in applying for funding or recruiting volunteer trail groups.

**Total Mileage of Proposed Project:** 2.0 miles

**Partnerships:** Costilla County, SCC Los Valles District, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

**Funding Sources:** American Trails Association, GOCO, IMBA

### PROPOSED PROJECT: GREENBELT TRAIL EXTENSION TO RITO SECO PARK

With the close proximity of portions of the Greenbelt Trail to Rito Seco Park, the county has identified additional trail linkages to connect the trail to the park. This project would

provide additional hiking opportunities for campers at the park or hikers on the greenbelt trail.

**Recommendation:** Extending the existing Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail from its southern terminus to Rito Seco Park would provide additional recreational opportunities. It appears as though this connection may have once existed, however, property belonging to the Battle Mountain Gold mine currently sits between the southern terminus of the trail and the park.

**Strategies:** The opportunity exists for a trail to follow the ridge top to the east and north of the mine property and eventually drop down into the park area. The County should consult with the County Assessor's Office to identify property boundaries and to discuss the possible trail that has been identified. Eventually, the County would want to consult with the National Park Service and SCC to determine sustainable trail practices and routes to the park.

**Total Mileage of Proposed Project:** 1.9 miles

**Partnerships:** Costilla County, National Park Service, SCC

**Funding Sources:** American Trails Association, IMBA, GOCO

### PROPOSED PROJECT: DEVELOP THE SANGRE DE CRISTO GREENBELT TRAIL LOOP

Being one of only two publicly accessible greenbelt areas in the county, the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt has the potential to expand its recreational opportunities. The Greenbelt Area currently has one single track trail that can be accessed at two different locations but lacks adequate signage outlining visitor information. To increase use by county residents and promote the site to visitors, the County has identified recommendations and strategies to design a trail that circumnavigates the entire Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Area. To increase the area's usability with the development of the Trail Loop, the County will also consider proper signage and trail advocacy strategies.

**Recommendation:** The idea is to take the existing linear trail and create a loop trail and provide multiple access points at various locations for user accessibility while also adding variety to the visitor's experience. The Greenbelt is essentially a circle shaped area encompassing 3,968-acres. A trail could, depending on the exact topography of the area, follow the Greenbelt northeast out of Rito Seco Park, to access the northern most part of the area and then



connect the trail to the southern portions of the Greenbelt at Balleroy Road trailhead.

**Strategies:** Due to the varying topography in the area, a reconnaissance survey will need to be completed to identify access points and trail issues and outline a trail layout.

**Total Mileage of Proposed Project:** 12.0 miles

**Partnerships:** BLM, Rio Grande Natural Area Commission, NPS, SCC, Costilla County

**Funding Sources:** American Trails Association, IMBA, GOCO





*Fort Garland Safe Route to School*

### **PROPOSED PROJECT: ESTABLISH THE RIO GRANDE GREENBELT RECREATION AREA**

Costilla County was deeded an 862-acre parcel of greenbelt space within the Rio Grande Ranchos subdivision. The Rio Grande Greenbelt extends north to south along the river corridor. The northern section starts just a little south of Highway 142 and is characterized by canyon walls which extend to the site of the old rock dam. South of the old dam the landscape flattens-out and the area is characterized by grasses and shrubs that lead to the riverbank. The southern terminus of the Greenbelt area is at La Jara Trail Road. There is a cattle guard on the north side of La Jara Trail Road that leads into the Greenbelt property. A two-track trail heads north from the cattle guard to the old dam site.

**Recommendations:** The greenbelt area along the Rio Grande provides multiple opportunities to develop a trail and recreational amenities to provide county residents and visitors safe river recreational opportunities – fishing, camping, hiking, and possibly boating. Examining the current condition and the historical uses of the two track trail that leads to the old dam site will give the county a better idea of how to expand and/or improve the trail. The trail direction needs to be examined closer as it gets faint as it climbs to the canyon rim. The trail has the potential to be extended to follow the canyon rim to the north end of the Greenbelt property where a second cattle guard leads into the Greenbelt property from Rio Grande Road. The area just past the cattle guard is also well suited for a potential parking area and the establishment of an overnight camping and a day use picnic area.

**Strategies:** Because this area is within the Rio Grande Natural Area which is led by a commission of local residents and resource experts to establish a management plan, the County should work closely to ensure any

plans and designs are compatible with the Commission's recommendations. The County should use the Bureau of Land Management to identify recreational amenities and compatible uses within the Greenbelt Area that complement the recreational resources on the west side of the river. The County should also consult with the National Park Service and SCC to discuss trail layout and sustainable designs for trail extensions or trail improvements.

**Total Mileage of Proposed Project:** 4.0 miles

**Partnerships:** BLM, Rio Grande Natural Area Commission, NPS, SCC, Costilla County

**Funding Sources:** American Trails Association, IMBA, GOCO

### **PROPOSED PROJECT: EXTENDING THE FORT GARLAND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL WALKING PATH**

The possibility has been proposed to extend the Safe Routes to School Walking Path from Fort Garland to Blanca and from Fort Garland to the Veterans Park. The trail extension would provide additional communities the ability to use a safe walking path to access various points of interest within the Fort Garland-Blanca Area including walking to school, accessing the Veterans Park and the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center.

**Recommendation:** Extend the existing Fort Garland walking path west to the town of Blanca (an approximate 3 mile extension) and east to the Veteran's Park (approximately .8 miles).

**Strategies:** The Safe Routes to School grant program is the best funding source to apply for assistance in extending the walking path. The County, the Town of Blanca and the Fort Garland Revitalization Committee could work together to identify the best location for the route to extend to in the Town of Blanca and the best directional route to get to the Veterans Park.

**Total Mileage of Proposed Project:** 3.8 miles

**Partnerships:** Costilla County, Town of Fort Garland and Blanca Revitalization Committee, Sierra Grande School District, The Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center.

**Funding Sources:** National Center for Safe Routes to School; CDOT Transportation, Planning Regions

## **PROPOSED PROJECT: SAN LUIS HERITAGE WALKING TOUR**

Another proposed project, though not a trail in the traditional sense, is the creation of a walking tour of the town of San Luis' historic and cultural sites. The tour is a response to the community's desire to promote its heritage resources. In August 2011, the Costilla County Economic Development Council in collaboration with the National Park Service designed a walking tour that takes into account areas of high significant value within the town of San Luis while also limiting access to culturally sensitive areas. Locations of signage and stopping points along the walking tour will emphasize points of interest while also respecting private property, and limiting access to culturally sensitive areas.

### ***A Main Street walking tour of San Luis could include the following stops:***

#### **Sangre de Cristo Parish Church:**

Although Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Conejos is said to be the first Catholic Church in Colorado, built in 1856, oral accounts state that places of worship were first constructed in Costilla County in the early 1850s. Early accounts state that the first church was located 200 yards



*Sangre de Cristo Parish Church, San Luis*



*San Luis Heritage Tours*

east of the current church. The first church likely had a flat roof, deeply indented entryway and massive buttresses. By the 1880s the first church in San Luis was in disrepair. In 1886 the current structure was completed. Adobe masons laid 16-inch long adobe blocks to form a 27-foot wide nave. Under the direction of Father Garcia from 1913-1917 transepts, stucco, ornate wooden lattices, impressive central and side altars and plaster statues were added to give the church its contemporary look.

#### **Costilla County Courthouse:**

The Costilla County Courthouse is a rare example of Territorial Style architecture and it is one of only two intact adobe courthouses in Colorado. Territorial architecture can generally be described as a mix between Pueblo and Victorian building styles. As the name suggests, it was developed in the Old West's territorial pre-statehood days, when this vast region was populated by European and American settlers who brought with them Victorian two and three story building traditions, but often found pueblo building techniques to be more practical. The methods and materials used to build the courthouse are a unique blend of Anglo-European masonry and the traditional adobe materials used by the area's Hispano settlers. This combination resulted in the production of smaller than usual adobe blocks laid up in a common bond brick pattern. The Courthouse was first built in 1883 with a series of additions and renovations as depicted on the interpretive sign. After a serious flood and continuing drainage issues, the building was condemned in 2002. The Costilla County Commissioners received a \$10,000 assessment grant from the Colorado Historical Society and from then on the County Commissioners dedicated significant time and resources to restore the building with substantial



*R&R Market*

additional funding provided by the Colorado Historical Society. Many local residents view the courthouse as the heart and soul of the town and integral to the character of San Luis' Main Street. Rehabilitation of the building was complete in 2008.

### **San Luis People's Ditch:**

The San Luis People's Ditch is the first adjudicated water right in Colorado. The waterways or ditches that irrigate the local farms and ranches are called acequias, an Arabic term meaning "the water conduit." There are currently 64 acequias in the local area. This Spanish/Mexican tradition originated during the Moors' occupation of Spain which occurred between 710-1490. Acequias are man-made earthen channels, or concrete lined ditches, which carry snow runoff and river water to distant agricultural fields. Acequias follow the contours of the land and utilize gravity to aid in irrigation. In many villages, both past and present, the acequia association with its commission and mayordomo constitute the only regulatory body or government of any sort. Each landowner along an acequia is called a parciante and the allocation and distribution of irrigated water among the parciantes is governed by an acequia commission including one person who is selected as steward, or mayordomo, of the ditch. The mayordomo is in charge of water allocation and distribution and directs all work performed on the ditch and its structures. Everyone who irrigates with the system has an obligation to help maintain the ditch. The annual

spring limpieza or ditch cleaning is when all the parciantes gather to clear accumulated silt and other debris from the temporarily dried ditch to prepare the ditch for the upcoming irrigation season.

### **La Vega:**

La Vega is the only Mexican-Era land grant commons in Colorado.

Although land grants in New Mexico include commons lands utilized in a traditional manner, those tracts were established during the period of Mexican jurisdiction. By contrast La Vega was established after the US took possession of the area from Mexico. Continuing to serve its original purpose of communal grazing, La Vega was designated by an 1863 covenant for villagers living in the Culebra Basin. Allocated for use by residents of seven villages, the commons includes 633-acres and is maintained and managed by local descendants that still use the pasture for grazing. A 1916 court case formally delineated the extent of La Vega.

### **Huberto Maestas' Sculpture Studio:**

Huberto Maestas is a sculptor living in San Luis, Colorado. His notable works include the life-sized Stations of the Cross located in San Luis, Colorado, miniatures of which are in the Vatican collection, the statue of Padre Martinez in Taos, New Mexico and the statue of Jack Dempsey in Manassa, Colorado. Huberto's Sculpture Studio specializes

in high quality limited edition bronze works. Diversified in his work albeit sculpting the human form, wildlife, or inanimate objects, Maestas couples his artistic vision with technical skill. His works of art in bronze range from small table top pieces to public monuments.

**R&R Market:**

The R&R Market is the oldest continuously operating store in Colorado, first established in 1857. The store was founded by Dario Gallegos and it has been operated by members of the same family ever since. Dario would get his supplies from Saint Louis, Missouri, a nine month trip.

**Recommendation:** A self-guided walking tour will be complimented with interpretive signage and brochures for visitors to use to learn more about these points of interest. The brochures will emphasize rules to consider when participating in the tour such as respect private property, stay on designated walkways, etiquette on photography. The brochure will also include a listing of local accommodations – lodging, restaurants, camping, stores, gas stations, and other recreational opportunities in the county.

**Strategy:** Costilla County, the Costilla County Economic Development Council, and the National Park Service will work in partnership to develop a self-guided walking tour interpretive media product such as a pamphlet, booklet, or brochure for use by the visitor on the tour. Occasional paid guided tours could be offered by docents trained by the National Park Service. The Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center will make the brochures available and be the informational center for questions on the tour.

Several other trails in Costilla County have been proposed in the Great San Luis Valley Trails and Recreation Master Plan from 1996. Very few details of these proposed trails were presented in the 1996 Master Plan and most of these trails travel through private property. However, since the time was taken in 1996 to catalogue and include these trail ideas in the Great San Luis Valley Trails and Recreation Master Plan, it is hoped that we can learn more about these trail opportunities, who are the proponents of each trail and evaluate the likelihood of developing these trails.

**Partnerships:** NPS, Costilla County, Costilla County Economic Development Council

**Funding Source:** NPS, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, and State Historical Funds.

**Listed below are some of the highlights of proposed trails in Costilla County from the 1996 Master Plan.**

**Old Spanish Trail** - The North Branch of the Old Spanish Trail proceeded due north from Santa Fe, New Mexico into Colorado's San Luis Valley and crossed west over Cochetopa Pass to follow the Gunnison and Colorado rivers to meet the Southern Branch of the Old Spanish Trail near Green River. The East Fork of the North Branch traverses the east side of the San Luis Valley, east of Wild Horse Mesa, along Sanchez Reservoir, through the towns of San Luis and Blanca in Costilla County, and along the Great Sand Dunes National Park, north to Crestone, before turning west across the valley.

**Smith Trail** - is a proposed connection from the town of Blanca to Smith Reservoir following county roads.

**Trinchera Trail** - is a proposed trail that would follow Trinchera Creek from Smith Reservoir to the Alamosa Wildlife Refuge.

**West Indian Creek Interpretative Loop** - is listed in the 1996 Master Plan, but with no other information available about the trail project

**Rattlesnake Canyon Loop Trail** - is listed in the 1996 Master Plan, but with no other information available about the trail project

**American Gulch Trail** - is listed in the 1996 Master Plan, but with no other information available about the trail project

**Chama Pilgrim Loop Trail** – a roadside walk from the church in Chama to the Stations of the Cross Shrine in San Luis

**San Francisco Pilgrim Loop Trail** – a roadside walk from the church in San Francisco to the Stations of the Cross Shrine in San Luis

**San Pedro Mesa Trail** – is listed in the 1996 Master Plan, but with no other information available about the trail project

**Costilla Creek Trail** – is listed in the 1996 Master Plan, but with no other information available about the trail project

**Sangre de Cristo Trail** – is a proposed trail that would connect Mountain Home Reservoir and Smith Reservoir.



# Operations &

## Chapter 6:

# Maintenance

## Operations and Maintenance



*Fort Garland Park*

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## OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

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The proposed recommendations for operation and maintenance of trails and recreational support facilities and recreational areas within Costilla County were developed in conversations with county officials and the County Road and Bridge Department. Depending on the project priority, one or several approaches may be part of the solution. Maintaining existing or developed trails will require a different approach than maintaining existing recreational facilities such as landscapes, playgrounds, park bathrooms, and campgrounds. Because the nature of maintenance is dependent on the site condition, available county resources and funding sources, the recommendations will need to be revisited each year.

The purpose of these recommendations is to ensure that recreational areas are safe and accessible for residents and visitors to enjoy.

### **DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES: *COSTILLA COUNTY ROAD AND BRIDGE DEPARTMENT***

The Road and Bridge Department is an essential partner in any discussions on maintenance and operations of existing facilities and development of new trails and recreational resources or any structures that increase accessibility to recreational facilities. They have knowledge and resources to help the county increase accessibility for residents and visitors to participate in recreational activities, to provide safe, clean facilities, make repairs to existing infrastructure, or anticipate maintenance needs for proposed recreational areas. They have creatively developed partnerships to share in the responsibility of beautifying communities and enhancing roadways and signs which in return benefit local residents. They are the branch of the county that is responsible for the following duties:

- Coordinate road and bridge maintenance and construction projects and activities with appropriate personnel.
- Develop work plans, schedules, priorities and materials/procurement requests.
- Make emergency plans and initiate employee call backs as required.
- Develop weekly, monthly and annual schedules of prioritized maintenance work.

- Direct traffic control operations, equipment mobilization, fueling of equipment, training and safety program management.
- Calculate quantities of material required; monitor and account for materials usage

Specific to recreational facilities and trails, the Costilla County Road and Bridge Department responds to repairs, inspections, and general maintenance of county roads, bridges, and signs. Through a group effort, road supervisors and road graders regularly inspect roads and signs within the county. All road signs are on an annual maintenance schedule. The labor for installing road signs is a shared responsibility with partners such as the Southwest Conservation Corp Community crew. The county's budget for maintaining county signs ranges from \$15,000-20,000. County sign standards are 18' x 18' directional signs and estimated at \$45/sign. The Department is currently in the process of replacing street name signs, stop signs, directional and speed limit signs. Without adequate road signs, inspections of roads and bridges, county residents and visitors will not gain safe access to county-owned recreational areas to enjoy a picnic, hike, or time fishing at the reservoir.

Ensuring clean and safe support facilities at recreational areas is another responsibility of the Department. Without proper sanitation and maintenance of these facilities, the public is left to find other unsanitary ways to dispose of waste or damage resources. The Road and Bridge Department inspect, repair, and maintain restrooms, trash bins, and recreational structures (picnic tables, playground equipment) and/or maintain landscapes at the Fort Garland Park, Rito Seco Park, Stabilization Park, Sanchez Reservoir, and Mountain Home Reservoir. Partnerships make some of the routine maintenance possible on non-county owned lands such as the Stabilization Park and other reservoirs managed by the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife. The county hires at least two seasonal part-time employees to help with routine maintenance of facilities during the busy summer season and hunting seasons – mid-May to mid-October.

Trails maintenance is currently not on a routine scheduled inspection and general maintenance for the Department. Because of the lack of a formal trail system within the county, the Road and Bridge Department has not dedicated resources to maintaining the few existing trails such as the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail.

Overall, the county feels they have the capacity and resources to purchase supplies to beautify parks and help maintain trails, roads, signs, and other infrastructure



(parking lots, trash cans, restrooms, bridges, etc.) They will continue to seek out partnerships and employ seasonal employees to assist with the priority maintenance work. A list of priority maintenance needs and recommendations (including funding sources when appropriate) has been identified for each trails, recreation, and open space project. The hope is that the county can work together to agree on the priorities and how to financially support the maintenance and operation of each project.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS: RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT**

Recreational facilities support a variety of recreational activities that are communal or solitary in nature, active or passive, outdoors or indoors. Swimming pools, indoor sports facilities, sports fields, boating facilities, piers, park signage, and restrooms are just a few examples. Recreational equipment on the other hand relate more specifically to playground equipment (slides, swings, merry-go-round), park benches, picnic tables and grills, pavilions, and sports equipment for indoor or outdoor. During the development of the Master plan, an initial condition assessment was conducted on county recreational resources to identify potential improvements to recreational facilities and equipment. In addition, county residents were able to voice their concerns with the current condition of recreational facilities, providing opinions on how to improve and increase accessibility to parks, fishing areas, trails, and identify their concerns with litter and unclean restroom facilities and picnic areas.

#### **General Community Requests:**

- Improve existing county parks specifically Rito Seco Park, Sanchez Reservoir, and the Town of San Luis Park
- Create regulations and enforce them in the park
- Increase trash patrol to protect natural areas
- Repair and clean-up picnic areas
- Repair and clean bathrooms in all county parks
- Provide landscaping in county parks
- Provide trash bins and trash pick-up

### **MAINTENANCE RECOMMENDATIONS: CURRENT LIST OF MAINTENANCE NEEDS FOR RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES WITHIN THE COUNTY**

#### **Rito Seco Park:**

- Develop informational signage at park (etiquette, park hours)
- Develop, install, and maintain signage along major roadways along Hwy 159 and Balleroy Road
- Increase trash pick-up
- Provide trash bins
- Maintain campgrounds (clean-up, designate campgrounds on durable surfaces)
- Stabilize areas along creek to avoid erosion, litter in creek, and increase safety
- Develop a parking lot and continue road grading
- Maintain picnic areas
- Implement restroom maintenance

#### **Veterans Park:**

- Maintain partnerships with community organizations to assist with landscaping
- Provide more trash bins
- Post park signage for park hours, etiquette, and uses

#### **Maintenance needs for the following sites should be completed in cooperation with current partners:**

##### **Fort Garland Park:**

- Repair/replace picnic tables
- Repair basketball court
- Continue with park maintenance

##### **Stabilization Reservoir:**

- Provide trash bins
- Clean BBQ pits in picnic area
- Repair/replace picnic tables and benches

- Establish campground areas on durable surfaces
- Provide informational signage on hours, uses, etiquette

**Mountain Home, Sanchez, and Smith Reservoir:**

- Provide informational signage on hours, seasonal restrictions
- Establish campgrounds on durable surfaces and maintain sites (clean out fire pits, etc.)
- Maintain roads and restrooms
- Trail maintenance (brush clearing)

**Town of San Luis Park:**

- Improve landscaping (mow, plant native plants, trim trees, etc.)
- Increase trash pick-up
- Provide trash bins
- Repair and/or replace picnic tables, benches
- Repair basketball court
- Upgrade or improve playground equipment
- Inspect the safety of structures within park boundaries – bell tower, old school gym

**Town of Blanca Park:**

- Repair playground equipment with more durable equipment
- Install shade structure to ensure equipment longevity
- Maintain landscaping
- Increase trash pick-up

**Community surveys suggested that the operation and maintenance of the above requests could be completed by:**

- Shared responsibilities
- Volunteerism
- Creating an “adopt a park” program
- Parks and Recreation District

**In discussions with the County Road and Bridge Department, they remain committed to routine scheduled inspections, repairs and general maintenance of recreational facilities they currently oversee for:**

- Roads, bridges, and signage
- Landscapes
- Recreational facilities – Rito Seco Park, Stabilization Reservoir, Sanchez Reservoir, Fort Garland Park, and Veterans Park

**Opportunities:**

- Utilize the Southwest Conservation Corps community crews to help the county clean campgrounds and picnic areas at the Rito Seco Park.
- The county will continue to maintain the road to the park.
- The county is also considering trash cans at Rito Seco Park and posting signs such as “Keep Park Clean” and “No Dumping Allowed” to educate visitors.
- During high visitation, the county will increase routine maintenance at Rito Seco park.
- The county will continue to grade the road to Sanchez Reservoir to maintain safe access to the recreational area.
- The county has developed a partnership with the local American Legion to assist with the landscaping and overall maintenance of the Veterans Park. This partnership will be used as an example for developing partnerships with Sembrando Semillas and Adams State University to organize road and park clean-ups.

Maintaining any new facilities not currently on their schedule will require a joint effort with partnership groups. They remain flexible to maintaining additional recreational facilities if any are further developed and working with partners such as CO Parks and Wildlife Department and local special interest groups such as the VFW, American Legion, and the Fort Garland/Blanca Community Center to add recreational facilities to their schedule.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAIL MAINTENANCE**

All trails benefit from routine maintenance. The level of trails maintenance can vary depending on the type of trail, accessibility of trail, trail maintenance needs and priorities, and trail infrastructure (signage, trash cans, etc.).

## **OPPORTUNITIES:**

The county already manages the road system and would be inclined to work with partners more versed in trail construction, and trail maintenance. In partnership, the county will work on establishing rules/policies for use of trails and recreational areas (trail etiquette, park rules, and safety), and identify funding sources and partnerships to address improvements, repairs, or future development. Since all potential or existing trails examined “go somewhere,” there are a variety of transportation funding sources that can be leveraged to cover costs for labor and supplies. Incorporating trails and side-paths into plans for the upkeep and improvement of County roads can make projects more attractive for funding. For the purpose of this document, the recommendations will address maintenance of trail signage, trash receptacles at trailheads, parking areas, and restrooms for the following projects. However, this guidance can also apply to any new trails that are not yet identified in this document:

- Sangre de Cristo Ranges Subdivision Greenbelt Trail Loop – using the existing linear trail, create a loop trail circumnavigating the entire greenbelt area with multiple access points to scenic views.
- Sangre de Cristo Ranges Subdivision Greenbelt Trail extension to Rito Seco Park – extend the trail from its southern terminus to the Rito Seco Park.
- Establish a Rito Seco Park Trail System – extend a trail from the park to the Battenburg Meadows within the Sangre de Cristo Ranges Subdivision Greenbelt
- Rio Grande Greenbelt Recreational Area – 3-mile hiking, biking, horseback riding trail along river and canyon rim linking to multiple access points for fishing, boating and camping

To better manage trails, the county, should consider the following options:

- Partnering with trails supervisors at public land management agencies to complete an assessment of trails and propose maintenance
- Create a trails authority in cooperation with state, and federal agencies to assure strong public involvement and support.
- Apply for assistance from Southwest Conservation Corps
- Create “adopt a trail” programs with local businesses and schools.

- Organize volunteer days to help clean trails or complete trail assessments.
- Create a trail users organization to provide feedback and report on issues concerning trail maintenance and safety issues.

For trail development and/or maintenance consider the following:

- Inventory the Trail and its related facilities.
- Set maintenance goals and standards for the quality of maintenance, hours of operation, etc.
- Develop tasks necessary to achieve maintenance quality levels.
- Assign the maintenance tasks to designated groups or individuals.
- Monitor the quality and frequency of the work.
- Implement a control system for tracking accomplishments and relevant costs.
- Evaluate the maintenance of the trail.

## **MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES:**

The following maintenance guidelines are generalized, and should be reviewed carefully when considering improvements and incorporating trails into routine maintenance. Trail maintenance should be taken seriously as it relates to trail safety, attractiveness, and image.

Important maintenance tasks that management agencies must consider:

- Mowing - (3-4 times annually) 4-foot min. wide each side of trail where applicable.
- Pruning - (Annually) Prune woody vegetation 4-feet back from sides of trail – 14-foot vertical clearance.
- Removal of Trees/Limbs - (Annually) Evaluation/removal of unhealthy or dead trees and limbs. Fallen trees may remain as access control and to minimize disturbance.
- Signage - (periodically as required) Maintain directional and informational signs and permanent signs.
- Trail Surface on local roads - (periodically as required) Resurface based on county schedule.
- Trail Surface on gravel road - (periodically as required) Repair surface damage from vehicles, erosion, etc. Based on county schedule.

- Drainage Structures - (Minimum - Annually)  
Clean inlets, keep swales clear of debris. Complete rehabilitation during construction would dramatically reduce necessity for this type of maintenance after storms.
- Litter Pick Up - (Weekly or as required during high visitor use) Trailside-litter pickup. Access area litter pickup. Encourage continued user "carry-in, carry-out" policy.
- Trash Collection - (Weekly or daily during high visitor use) Removal of trash from receptacles at access areas.
- Bridges Inspection - (Every 2 years) Maintenance of bridge to ensure structural integrity. Bridges associated with public roads are already on a regular inspection schedule.

### **MAINTENANCE COSTS:**

Maintenance costs generally range from \$5,000 to \$7,000/ per mile/per year for similar trails. It's recommended that the responsible agencies use a figure of \$7,000 per mile to estimate maintenance costs during the first year after development. This figure can be evaluated at the end of the first year. This cost can be used for fundraising purposes as well as to solicit volunteer help for maintenance. It's suggested that the county supplement their trails maintenance by creating partnership agreements with local businesses, clubs and organizations. Formal cooperative agreements can be made with these partners that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each party. Developing an effective trails maintenance program is an on-going process.

Based on the community's priorities and recommendations for open space, trails and recreation within the county, the following operation and maintenance costs have been identified

- Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision Greenbelt Trail Loop – using the existing linear trail, create a loop trail circumnavigating the entire greenbelt area with multiple access points to scenic views.

Costs: \$7,000/mile for a 3-mile trail

Additional costs: Road grading, Hazards Removal, Trail signage, Road signage,

- Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision Greenbelt Trail extension to Rito Seco Park – extend the trail from its southern terminus to the Rito Seco Park.

Costs: \$7,000/mile for a 3-mile trail

- Establish a Rito Seco Park Trail System – extend a trail from the park to the Battenburg Meadows within the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision Greenbelt

Costs: \$7,000/mile for a 3-mile trail

- Rio Grande Greenbelt Recreational Area – 3-mile hiking, biking, horseback riding trail along river and canyon rim linking to multiple access points for fishing, boating and camping

Costs: \$7,000/mile for a 3 mile trail

Other costs to consider include the following:

- Parking lot, Road grading, Trash cans, Restroom cleaning, and Campground clean-up.

# Plan Phasing &

## Chapter 7:

# Financing

## Plan Phasing and Financing: Investment



*Culebra Peak*

## PLAN PHASING AND FINANCING

The Costilla County Trails Recreation and Open Space Master Plan represents a solution to develop recreational opportunities for a large variety of users, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts. This proposed list of projects does not imply that funding exists nor does it imply that such a trail system or recreational facilities will be automatically funded in the future. Rather, this plan provides a strategy useful for seeking funding and in-kind support from public and/or private sources. By engaging the community in

the planning process, this Plan demonstrates the strong support of trails, recreation, and open space projects and the importance of these amenities.

The following table outlines priority projects that have been identified in the Master Plan thus far. These projects are organized in planning phases and include cost estimates to implement the projects, funding sources and partnerships. There are two phases for implementing priority projects considering construction and availability of financial support for labor, supplies, equipment, and sustainability.

PHASE 1 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION		Implemented within 1-3 years	
PROJECT	COST	POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCE(S)	PARTNERSHIPS
<b>Improve Rito Seco Park</b> Establish directional and informational signage Establish campgrounds Purchase and install new trash receptacles Organize park clean-up days Re-establish stream bank for safer access points to creek	\$2,000/sign (frame and fabrication) <\$600/trash receptacle	GOCO National Park Service Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, American Trails Association; private donations	Costilla County, CO Parks and Wildlife, NPS, Town of San Luis, Sembrando Semillas, Costilla County Public Health Agency, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area
<b>Improve Veterans Park</b> Purchase trash receptacles Continue landscape projects, build shade pavilion	<\$600/trash receptacle	GOCO Costilla County Veterans Organizations	Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Costilla County Road and Bridge, American Legion, Sierra Grande School District, VFW
<b>Restore, Maintain, &amp; Expand Sangre De Cristo Greenbelt Trail System</b> Research of trail connectivity from Rito Seco Park to existing Greenbelt Trail Identify trail extensions to other areas within Rito Seco Park Complete trail maintenance on a 1.5 mile stretch of the original Greenbelt Trail Construct ~ 2-mile of Greenbelt trail extension Develop an Adopt a Park Program for restoring and maintaining Rito Seco Park and Greenbelt Trails Develop a trails map for county website	NPS can provide in-kind services to do site visits & provide recommendations \$12,000 – labor costs for SCC camping crew for 2 weeks NPS can provide in-kind services for map	GOCO National Park Service Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) CO State Recreational Trails Program U.S. Forest Service Community Grant	Colorado Open Lands; Great Sand Dunes NP & Preserve; Costilla County; SCC; Costilla County Public Health Agency; CO Parks and Wildlife
<b>Improve Stabilization Reservoir</b> Purchase and install trash receptacles	<\$600/trash receptacle	GOCO Costilla County	NPS, Costilla County Road and Bridge, SCC, Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife
<b>Improve Fort Garland Park</b> Renovate pavilion and picnic area Resurface basketball court Replace basketball hoops and basket	Refinish ~\$150/table Concrete to re-surface = \$75/cu. yd. + \$0.10/sq./ft. (reinforcements) ~\$50-\$100 (hoops & basket)	County provides supplies and/or donations from non-profit organizations or partners SCC can provide labor to renovate Pavilion and picnic area	Costilla County, SCC, Sierra Grande School District, Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, Fort Garland/Blanca Community Center, Costilla County Road and Bridge, Fort Garland Water and Sanitation District
<b>Improve Mountain Home Reservoir</b> Develop informational signage	\$2,000/sign (frame, fabrication + design)	CO Parks and Wildlife Department GOCO	RTCA Program, Great Sand Dunes,
<b>Improve Smith Reservoir</b> Develop signage detailing restrictions and recreational Opportunities	\$2,000/sign (frame and fabrication + design) – SCC day crews can install	CO Division of Parks and Wildlife Costilla County	SCC, CO Division of Parks and Wildlife, Costilla County

PHASE 2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION		Implemented within 3-5 years	
PROJECT	COST	POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCE(S)	PARTNERSHIPS
<b>Improve Rito Seco Park</b> Install new restroom facilities Install new picnic tables	\$800-\$1,500/table	GOCO CO State Recreational Trails	Costilla County Road and Bridge Department, Costilla County
<b>Restore, Maintain, and Expand Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail System</b> Acquire subdivision lots that can increase greenbelt acreage	Price available upon appraisals	CO Open Lands, GOCO	Costilla County Planning and Zoning Department, CO Open Lands
<b>Restore, Maintain, and Expand Rio Grande Greenbelt Recreation Area</b> Acquire subdivision lots that can increase greenbelt acreage	Price available upon appraisals	CO Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, GOCO, BLM	Costilla County Planning and Zoning Department, CO Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust
<b>Stabilization Reservoir</b> Repair picnic tables	\$800-\$1,500/table	GOCO CO State Recreational Trails	Costilla County Road and Bridge Department, Costilla County





# Future Stewardship

## Chapter 8:

# and Planning

## Future Stewardship and Planning



*Culebra Valley*

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## FUTURE STEWARDSHIP & PLANNING

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Costilla County is committed to making the vision of the Master Plan come to fruition. So far, the Master Plan has outlined partnerships, funding sources, priority projects, and a framework for maintaining and operating existing and future recreational and trail facilities. This chapter focuses on establishing a future plan for the recommendations identified in the Master Plan. The idea is to have the plan adopted by the County Commissioners and available to the public on the County's website. Future planning also means that the plan is reviewed every three years and revised according to needs of the community and progress of the projects.

Another component of future planning is defining a process for moving forward with implementation of specific recommendations and priorities. Project implementation can occur on a variety of levels but this chapter will outline how the county can ensure that the plan is reviewed and updated and define a process for approving projects and monitoring the progress of project implementation.

Project Implementation: Costilla County Recreation Advisory Board

To advise County Commissioners, the Planning and Zoning Department, and County Administrators, it is recommended the County appoint members of the community to a County Recreation Advisory Board. The purpose of the Board is to recommend funding sources, and/or partnerships that support priority projects in the Master Plan. The Board will also keep the County abreast of new opportunities for additional trails and recreational projects. This board can ensure the document is put to use and discussed during critical planning and budget meetings and grant assistance is pursued to make some of these projects a reality. The Board at a minimum should comprise of:

- Representative from the County Planning and Zoning Board
- Representative from a Youth Organization
- Representative from the Blanca/Fort Garland Revitalization Committee
- Representative from the Road and Bridge Department
- Representative from a community non-profit organization involved in service projects
- Representative from the Town Council of San Luis

- Representative from the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center
- Representative from a County School District

The Advisory Board will review the plan at a minimum on an annual basis to ensure the phases of the Master Plan are considered during county budget meetings and to pursue grants, organize events, and propose partnerships. During more frequent meetings, the Board should discuss moving projects forward, updating the Board on other opportunities to collaborate, and report on the progress of other projects related to conservation of open space, and trails and recreation.

### **STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

Implementing the recommendations in the Master Plan is also the responsibility of community members motivated to enhance their parks and promote the existing trails. It is encouraged to organize park cleanup days, trail maintenance days, or organize fundraising events to implement any of the priority projects outlined in this document. Some suggestions are outlined below:

- Work with the Blanca/Fort Garland Community Center Director to organize park clean up days during after school programs. Supplies such as gloves, trash pickers, and trash bags can be donated by local vendors. One hour of trash pick-up at the Fort Garland, Veterans, or Blanca parks can go a long way plus it teaches the younger generations the importance of caring for places in their community.
- Collaborate with Sierra Grande or Centennial School Districts to organize Adopt a Park Programs in their classrooms or amongst teachers and administrators.
- Work with the Town Council of San Luis to organize park clean-ups and landscaping days at the Town of San Luis Park.
- Collaborate with the CO Parks and Wildlife Division to provide a guided hike on the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Trail.

# Appendix



*Culebra River adobe*

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## APPENDIX 1: CORRIDOR SCENIC OVERLAY DISTRICT

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### CORRIDOR SCENIC OVERLAY DISTRICT

**A. Purpose.** The purpose of the overlay district is to protect the scenic resources of the (name of road) corridor. The scenic resources of this section of the corridor are identified in the Town Plan as a special feature and are significant because of the high level of public use, the importance of corridor as a major transportation artery and (note features particular to the corridor).

**B. Permitted Uses:**

Any use allowed as a permitted use in the underlying district, except for the construction or expansion of structures.

**C. Conditional Uses:**

Any use allowed as a conditional use in the underlying district, including the construction or expansion of structures.

**D. Dimensional Standards**

Dimensional standards will be as required for the underlying district, except that greater standards may be required in order to meet the district purpose and specific standards.

**E. District Standards**

Construction of new principal and accessory structures or expansion of existing structures may be approved by the Board of Adjustment (or Design Review Board) subject to conditional use review under Section \_\_\_\_, and findings that the proposed use will have no undue adverse impact on the area and to the greatest extent possible the following standards are met:

1. Structures are sited so that they do not protrude above a ridgeline.
2. Structures are sited in wooded areas or on field edges.
3. Structures are sited in such a way that agricultural resources are not fragmented or otherwise impacted.
4. New structures are sited in proximity to areas of existing structures.
5. Existing vegetation is retained and supplemented with new plantings compatible with existing vegetation to screen structures and minimize impacts on views from the road corridor.
6. New roads and parking are sited away from open fields, follow existing contours to minimize the visual impact of cut and fill and be screened from the road corridor.
7. Structures are designed and sited so that the visual impact is minimized through means such as:
  - a. placing gable ends to the road;
  - b. avoiding long unbroken planes of building frontage;
  - c. use of colors and materials that are compatible with surrounding structures and natural features, and;
  - d. use of materials which minimize glare from reflective surfaces or siting so that glare is not visible from the road corridor.



# Planning Implementation Tools Density Bonus



Center for Land Use Education

www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/

November 2005

## TOOL DESCRIPTION

A density bonus is an incentive-based tool that permits developers to increase the maximum allowable development on a property in exchange for helping the community achieve public policy goals. Increasing development density may allow for increases in developed square footage or increases in the number of developed units. This tool works best in areas where growth pressures are strong and land availability limited or when incentives for attaining the goals outweigh alternative development options.

## COMMON USES

### *Environmental Protection*

A density bonus is commonly used to promote conservation or improvement of natural resources and open space. A community may allow a developer to build more units than is permitted in an area in exchange for permanently protecting green spaces or by making environmental improvements such as with landscaping or developing a nature trail in a project area. This technique can be used to protect land on the property being developed or on another property.

### *Low Income Housing*

Density bonuses are often used to increase the supply of affordable housing for low income or senior households. Density bonus ordinances permit developers to increase the square footage or number of units allowed on a piece of property if they agree to restrict the rents or sales prices of a certain number of the units for low income or senior households. The additional cash flow from these bonus units offsets the reduced revenue from the affordable units.

## Possible Uses

Amenities provided in exchange for a density bonus:

- ◆ affordable housing;
- ◆ housing for people with special needs;
- ◆ child care facilities;
- ◆ underground parking.
- ◆ waterfront walkways;
- ◆ open spaces, public plazas and fishing piers;
- ◆ landscaping;
- ◆ preservation of historic structures;
- ◆ preservation of sensitive and/or unique environmental areas
- ◆ guide development to preferred locations



*Figure 1: Density Bonus to Achieve Plan Goals*

Density Bonus to Achieve Plan Goals  
The city's comprehensive plan outlines several goals including:

1. Improve pedestrian and bike access to local schools.
2. Provide residents safe access to bike and nature trails.
3. Increase and improve coverage of city parks and green spaces.

A local landowner wants to develop 20-acres in an area that has a good spot for a trail extension but would require a bridge over the river. This route would allow residents safe access to an existing nature trail and more children to walk or bike to school. Current policies allow single-family houses on ¼ acres lots or larger. If the landowner helps to pay for the trail extension and donates 5-acres for a park, the city will allow 23 additional housing units on the property.



## IMPLEMENTATION

### CREATION

Density bonuses are typically tied to zoning ordinances or subdivision regulations. There are three basic steps for creating density bonuses:

- 1. Define the purpose for providing density bonuses.** — Goals and objectives in the comprehensive plan should help to define the purpose of a density bonus e.g. encourage developers to protect open space, agriculture, or historical structures, create an amenity such as a trail or public space, or provide affordable housing.
- 2. Identify the area where the bonuses are allowed.** — Areas should be identified that meet program goals. If the purpose is to increase density near public transit for example, then developable land near transit corridors should be identified. If the purpose is to increase affordable housing throughout the city, then all areas in the city are appropriate. Identified areas should be mapped as part of the ordinance.
- 3. Develop specific policy for allowing bonuses.** — A written policy must complement every area identified on the map. Policy language should identify allowable density increases (i.e. total number of units or maximum square footage). If resources are to be protected, legal means, such as easements must be included. (see fact sheet on conservation easements) If amenities are to be created, such as trails, standards must be included for acceptable design, construction, and location. For affordable housing, criteria must designate the number or percentage of affordable units needed for bonus eligibility. Type of housing (single family, duplex, multi-family), income limits, sale price, or rent limits, should also be considered.

“It is important that density bonuses be directly tied to the goals and objectives of a comprehensive plan. The public should be invited to participate in both the ordinance development process and the site plan review as there may be concerns, especially by adjacent landowners, about the impact of the increased density.”

### ADMINISTRATION

Developers interested in applying for a density bonus should meet with the appropriate municipal staff to determine if their proposal will qualify for the bonus program. Staff will review the site plan before approving the project to ensure that the granting of the bonus does not have an adverse effect on adjacent properties in the zoning district and that utilities are available to serve the additional units. Land set aside for environmental protection, buffers, greenspace or trails must have restrictions or easements recorded on the deed before construction begins to make sure that they are not developed in the future.

Units created as part of an affordable housing initiative will need to be monitored or deed-restricted for the entire time they are part of the program to ensure affordability and compliance. Staff will monitor income eligibility and rent or sales price restrictions. Penalties such as fines should be used to enforce compliance. In place of a municipality, non-profit housing organizations are suitable entities to manage bonus dwelling units designated for affordable housing.

## *Report Card: Density Bonus*

<b>Cost</b>	Money or staff resources required to implement tool.
<b>B</b>	No direct cost to the community other than the staff or consultant time to set up the program and administer it. An additional staff person may be necessary if the community chooses to monitor an affordable housing program.
<b>Public Acceptance</b>	The public's positive or negative perception of the tool.
<b>B</b>	Generally, the public agrees that increasing density in one area while protecting a resource, adding an amenity or offering affordable housing is acceptable. It is important that density bonuses be directly tied to the goals and objectives of a comprehensive plan and that the public be invited to participate in the ordinance development process to increase acceptance of the project
<b>Political Acceptance</b>	Politician's willingness to implement tool.
<b>B</b>	Elected officials accept this tool if the local citizens see the value of the resource to be protected or the amenity to be added or if the ordinance helps the community to comply with state and federal programs such as affordable housing and environmental protection.
<b>Equity</b>	Fairness to stakeholders regarding who incurs costs and consequences.
<b>A</b>	This tool is perceived as fair because the community meets a planning goal at a lower cost and a developer recovers any additional costs from added requirements through an increase in the number of units available for rent or sale.
<b>Administration</b>	Level of complexity to manage, maintain, enforce, and monitor the tool.
<b>B</b>	Someone must review site plans prior to construction and ensure that any preserved open space is legally protected and amenity construction and maintenance is assigned to the appropriate party. Additional staff may be needed if the community will monitor an affordable housing program.
<b>Scale</b>	The geographic scale at which tool is best implemented.
<b>Municipal to County</b>	This tool is generally used at the municipal level but could be used at a larger scale if issues of tax base and service delivery can be solved.

**GRADING EXPLANATION**

A - Excellent

B - Above Average

C - Average

D - Below Average

F - Failing

Comments and grades were derived from a Delphi process conducted with practicing planners and educators in 2005

## WISCONSIN EXAMPLES

*Figure 2: Husher Highlands (106 acres, not sewered) was initially allowed 21.3 units. The new design included an open space funding mechanism, trail connections, internal and linked open space, and all lots next to open space. Developers received an additional 5 units.*



### City of Madison

The City of Madison's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance uses a city-wide density bonus to encourage developers to provide housing for low/moderate (workforce) income families. To receive a density bonus, eligible housing projects of ten or more total units must include a minimum of 15 percent affordable units. The size of the density bonus awarded to developers is determined using a point system. The system awards points based on criteria developed by a committee/commission/council process. Each point earns developers 10-20 percent more allowable units (depending on the number of stories, total units and available parking) up to a three point maximum. For example, if a housing project originally includes 40 units, and the developer earns two incentive points, the developer might receive a bonus of four to eight additional housing units. A special pre-application review process and policy manual is available to developers to determine bonus values and ensure compliance with the ordinance.

### Village of Caledonia, Racine Co.

The Village of Caledonia's subdivision ordinance mandates the use of conservation design. The goal of the ordinance is to protect and maintain quality open space. The Village offers developers up to an additional 20% density bonus to the number of lots initially allowed if they are willing to include additional standards such as self-funding for open space management, designing internal and external connectivity for trails and open space, designing 75% or more of all lots to abut open space and preserving primary or secondary environmental corridors.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Arendt, Randall (1994). *Rural by Design: Maintaining Small Town Character* Planners Press, American Planning Association, Washington, DC.

Pace University Land Use Law Center, White Plains, NY. *Incentive Zoning, SERIES III: Innovative Tools and Techniques, Issue Number 7.* Available at <http://www.law.pace.edu/landuse/bincent.html>

Regulatory Barriers Clearinghouse, Washington DC. *Breakthroughs: Successful local Strategies for Affordable Housing Vol 2, Issue 4.* Available at <http://www.huduser.org/rbc/newsletter/vol2iss4more.html>

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resource - Natural Resource Guidance Checklist  
Conserving Natural Resources through Density Bonuses



**Why Use Density Bonuses & This Checklist**

Local units of government may use density bonuses as part of their development review and/or subdivision approval process. This approach assumes that if specified criteria are met, then a proposed development be approved with more use of a site (such as more dwelling units per acre or more square footage of non-residential buildings) than would otherwise be permitted by the community. That is, greater development density would be allowed if certain conditions are met. These "density bonuses" are a form of incentive that a community can offer to a developer who does the kind of development that a community seeks. Thus, a city can legally and equitably say to each developer: if you do what we would like in your development then you can increase the amount of development and thereby pay for more of the improvements we request. Thus, such density bonuses may be used to achieve a wide array of community objectives, such as mixed land use, mixed income housing (affordable housing), architectural enhancements, or, as addressed in this checklist, conservation of natural resources. A list of density bonus criteria is not a freestanding document, but would need to be incorporated into a community's subdivision, zoning, or other development review regulations.

**NR Checklist Series**

This is one of a series of "checklists" produced for local units of government (LUG) by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Metro Region. Each checklist is intended to help the community integrate natural resources into a particular type of local policy or plan. Each checklist is an outline of key components of a typical LUG planning document with important natural resource-related questions to consider and some examples, definitions, and references.

**A. General Considerations**

General requirements or density bonus

- How do the natural resource criteria listed below best fit into the community's development review process?
- Which (if any) of the criteria in this checklist should become part of the general development (or site plan review) requirements of the community which all development must meet?
  - Which are considered "extra" for purposes of giving density bonuses?
  - Are some forms of conservation (such as the following) so important that all development should meet them?
    - S protection of the ecologically highest quality natural areas (such as those identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey)
    - S establishment of interconnecting greenways
    - S sound stormwater management

Community priorities

- Does the community want to rank some of the natural resource criteria as more important than others?
  - For example, does the community want to use a natural resource inventory to identify and map its most

**Definitions**

**natural area**

a site largely unaltered by modern human activity, where vegetation is distributed in naturally occurring patterns.

**greenway**

a network of natural areas and natural resource-based open space which may be primarily intended as wildlife habitat corridors or may include trail connections

important types and locations of natural resources, its remaining natural areas, and/or greenway or trail alignments which are given more priority?

- Should the community evaluate development proposals on a case-by-case basis if each site is highly variable in what natural resources are present and the potential for their conservation?
- Does the community want to focus the application of density bonuses and these criteria in some geographic areas?
  - If so, does it make sense to use an overlay district approach?

#### Submission Requirements

- What information will be needed to ascertain whether a proposed development meets the natural resource conservation density bonus criteria?
- Which of the following items need to be included in a detailed inventory of existing natural resources on and adjoining the site as part of the submission to get a density bonus?
  - a scaled map of site features, such as:
    - S existing vegetation
    - S water features and wetlands
    - S slope and topography (e.g., 2' contour intervals)
    - S soils
  - other descriptions and/or maps, such as:
    - S natural areas and features on adjoining properties
    - S pre-settlement vegetation
    - S site hydrology
    - S proposed natural resource conservation strategies to meet density bonus criteria

#### Qualitative or quantitative use of criteria.

- How will the natural resource criteria be used in deciding how much of a density bonus will be granted?
  - What would be the maximum increase in density allowed?
    - S for example, 1.5 times current density
  - Must all of the criteria be met?
  - Must a certain number of points be achieved?
  - Are some criteria required to be met plus a certain number of others?
  - What specific actions equal what numbers of bonuses?
- Do the criteria need to be given as quantitative measures, such as the following?
  - #s of feet of buffer
  - #s or trees or acres of forest
  - % of land area conserved in natural open space
- Should the basic process and general (qualitative) criteria be

#### **See Another Checklist natural resource inventory**

A natural resource inventory and assessment identifies and prioritizes the natural resources that a community should manage through its plans and policies including development review strategies such as density bonuses. See the "Natural Resource Inventory and Analysis for City or County" Checklist..

#### **See Another Checklist natural area overlay district**

One tool a community can use to protect and conserve natural areas is a natural area overlay district ordinance used in conjunction with their zoning ordinance. See the "Natural Environmental Areas Overlay District Ordinance" Checklist.

adopted in an ordinance and the specific submission requirements and any specific (quantitative) criteria in separate administrative procedures (not codified in ordinance)?

- Will the people responsible for reviewing submissions be adequately qualified?

#### Preservation and/or restoration

- Will density bonuses only be given for “preservation” of existing natural resources, or can they be given for “restoration” or both?
  - What forms of “restoration” of natural resources could be counted towards a density bonus?
  - Does preservation of any type of existing feature result in more density bonus credit than restoration?
  - For example, would credit be given for replanting (restoration) a native plant community as a buffer for an existing natural area or restoration of any undeveloped open space?

#### Enforcement and maintenance

- How will protection of any area conserved for a density bonus be enforced both during construction and in perpetuity?
  - Under what conditions will permanent easements, covenants, or deed restrictions be required and who will hold them?
  - How will conservation areas be maintained and managed? (see comments below on marking buffers with monuments - which could apply to other types of conservation areas)
- Will a long term maintenance plan (natural resource management plan) and agreement be required?
  - How will this be enforced?
- Will prescribed burning be permitted (and accepted by adjoining neighbors) if that is advisable for managing the natural area?
- Does money need to be held in escrow or a bond established to cover problems or damage that might occur during construction?
- Who is responsible for any repair, mitigation, maintenance, etc. for subsequent problems?

#### **See Another Checklist**

##### **natural area management plan**

Once a community designates a site for protection as a natural area, a site-specific inventory and management plan is needed. The elements of this type of plan are outlined in the “**Natural Area Management Plan**” Checklist.

#### Phasing

Larger scale phased projects or larger scale contiguous areas with multiple landowners will go through city review and approvals at different times.

- Will coordinated environmental review, such as through an

- Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR), be used?
- How should the review and approval of density bonuses for natural resource conservation be coordinated for different phases of a project or for different projects within an AUAR study area?
- How can the location and type of natural open spaces and greenways be coordinated?
- For example, if 20 acres of a 100 acre development were coming through the review process, could conservation open space and easements be designated for future phases at the time the first 20 acres is reviewed and approved?

## **B. Criteria for Conserving Natural Resources**

*The following are some possible general criteria as well as some options to consider.*

### Shoreland/Riparian Setbacks

Increase the setback of buildings, etc. from lakes, streams, and wetlands.

- For example, to get a density bonus should the setback have to be double what is otherwise required?

### Greenways

Assure connection across the property for any relevant greenway corridor designated by the community.

- Should the land of this corridor be dedicated (deeded) to the city?
- Should extra greenway width be required to be dedicated to the local unit to qualify for a density bonus?

### Habitat

Preserve and protect large blocks of intact native habitat (such as native forest, prairie, etc.).

- How will the native habitats whose protection results in a density bonus be identified?
  - Should this include natural plant communities identified through the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System?
  - Should it focus on areas of ecologically high quality (relatively undisturbed) native plant communities and habitat for rare and endangered species as identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS)?
  - What other types or areas of locally important habitat should be conserved?
  - What are the preferred or minimum sizes and shapes of protection areas that would receive credit? I.e., how can ecological considerations on the habitat type

### **Resources**

#### **Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS)**

is a new GIS-based inventory method useful in providing land cover information for land use decision making which is being used throughout the Twin Cities Metro Region. It uses aerial photo interpretation and ground truthing to develop a GIS data layer with detailed native plant community and cultural land cover mapping to 1-2 acre polygon resolution. Contact MnDNR, Metro Region, [bart.richardson@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:bart.richardson@dnr.state.mn.us).

- influence reasonable size and shape for preservation?
- How will consideration be given on if/how such habitat is contiguous with (extends on to) adjoining property with opportunities to preserve larger, interconnected areas?
- How do such areas need to be preserved and managed to qualify for a density bonus?
  - How can the area's soil and ground layer of vegetation be protected from disturbance?
    - S For example, how would a natural forest be protected from being graded, mowed, and grazed?
  - How will rare and endangered plant species (and other forms of sensitive habitat) be protected from disturbance?
    - Will creation of buffer areas of natural vegetation be required?
    - Will human access be restricted or trails relocated?
  - Will a long term management plan be required which provides for ongoing protection of habitat?

#### Wooded Areas/Working Forests

Conserve wooded areas and/or trees (potentially including pine plantations, Christmas tree farms, and orchards).

- How will forested areas to conserve for a density bonus be identified? (see habitat discussion)
  - Will preference be given to conserving larger, contiguous areas of forest?
  - Will wetland mitigation plans be prohibited from destroying or impacting existing upland forest
- What forest management practices will be allowed or required?
  - Will forest conservation include assuring the "right to practice forestry"? That is, will active forest management practices, such as the harvest of trees for Christmas trees or timber and associated silvacultural practices, be allowed or promoted?
  - Will an ongoing forest management plan (particularly for plantations) be required?
- Will individual tree protection qualify for density bonus?
  - If individual tree protection is allowed, how will best management practices be used to protect the root zone and preventing construction damage?

### Buffers

Provide a buffer between the development and natural areas of concern.

- What natural areas and other features, such as the following, would be identified as needed buffers?
  - wetlands
  - shorelands
  - steep slopes and bluffs
  - MCBS-identified native plant communities
  - designated greenways
- What width, use, demarcation, and vegetation management is required for a “buffer” to be considered for a density bonus?
  - Does the area would need to be established in native vegetation and appropriately maintained (e.g., not mowed, unless for wildfire hazard mitigation)?
  - How would the minimum width (depth) of a buffer be based upon the buffer’s function, slope, and vegetative cover, using information such as the following?
    - S various research suggest a minimum depth of from 30' to 600'
    - S Forest Management Guidelines for riparian buffers suggest a minimum of 200' from the water’s edge
- Would a buffer have to be visibly marked and differentiated from residential yards to discourage adjoining residents from mowing or encroaching on the buffer with non-native landscape alterations, such as through the following?
  - S short, small, attractive signs
  - S landscape timbers
  - S monuments with locations recorded with GPS coordinates

### Undeveloped Open Space

Conserve in perpetuity at least 50% of the site in undeveloped open space.

- How does the community define “undeveloped open space” which could count for a density bonus?
  - Are areas (other than trails) excluded which are impervious (such as parking lots, tennis courts, etc.)?
  - Does it need to be established and maintained in non-mowed native vegetation (except for wildfire breaks)?
  - Is restoring and maintaining pre-settlement native plant communities in this open space given priority?
  - Can it be a working forest/tree plantation or agriculture if appropriate best management practices are applied?
  - Must this area be protected from disturbance during the construction process (e.g., not graded, driven upon, nor used for construction storage, staging, nor parking)?

- If any of this area is disturbed during construction, does its soil have to be “renovated” before replanting, such as through the following?
  - S deep tilling, etc. to reduce any compaction or hard pan layers
  - S incorporation of organic material

Low Impact Stormwater Management

Manage stormwater onsite through Low Impact Development (LID) techniques in order that runoff leaving the site does not exceed the rate or total volume that would exist if the site were undeveloped.

- How will density bonuses be given for features appropriately designed for site conditions which filter and infiltrate stormwater such as the following?
  - rural road sections with unmowed vegetated swales
  - rain gardens, etc.

Impervious Surfaces

Limit the amount of imperviousness, such as through reduced pavement width and length in streets and driveways.

- What reduction in imperviousness (such as the following) would qualify for a density bonus?
  - no more than 20% of the site in impervious surface
  - reduce the amount of imperviousness by \_\_\_\_ square feet for each additional housing unit provided through the density bonus

Shared Facilities/Utilities

Provide jointly-used (rather than individual owner) facilities whenever possible.

- What types of shared facilities (such as the following) would qualify for a density bonus?
  - shared dock or water access
  - installation of utilities in a common right-of-way and/or trench to minimize disruption of the site

**Definitions & Resource**

**low impact development (LID)**  
a new comprehensive land planning and engineering design approach with a goal of maintaining and enhancing the pre-development hydrologic regime of urban and developing watersheds.

For more information, go to [www.lowimpactdevelopment.org](http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org).

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**APPENDIX 3: SANGRE DE CRISTO RANCHES SUBDIVISION**

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***SANGRE DE CRISTO RANCHES  
SUBDIVISION***

<b>Priority Parcels for Potential County Acquisition</b>	U-2 West Side of Greenbelt Trail
<b>Parcels Adjacent to Existing Greenbelt</b>	Parcel #
U-2 East side of Greenbelt Trail	702-65-800
Parcel #	702-65-820
702-65-790	702-65-860
702-65-830	702-66-530
702-65-880	702-66-420
702-65-870	702-66-410
702-66-520	702-66-400
702-66-530	702-66-390
702-66-500	702-66-380
702-66-430	702-66-350
702-66-440	702-66-340
702-66-490	702-66-330
702-66-450	702-66-320
702-66-370	702-66-310
702-66-360	702-66-300
702-66-140	Sangre DE Cristo Ranches
702-66-150	F-3
702-66-170	Parcel #
702-66-180	702-23-770
702-66-270	702-23-800
702-66-280	702-23-730
702-66-290	702-23-740
702-66-511	702-23-680
702-66-260	702-23-690
702-66-250	702-23-700
702-66-240	702-23-280
	702-23-270
	702-23-320
	702-23-310



702-23-200	702-34-120
702-23-980	702-34-130
702-23-950	702-34-140
702-23-940	702-34-150
702-23-930	702-34-160
702-23-920	702-34-170
702-23-910	702-33-810
702-24-000	702-33-800
702-23-990	702-33-790
702-23-180	702-33-780
702-23-190	702-33-770
702-23-250	702-33-760
702-23-260	702-33-750
702-23-710	702-33-740
702-23-720	702-33-730
702-23-810	702-33-720
702-23-790	702-33-540
702-23-780	702-33-520
	702-33-470
Sangre de Cristo Ranches	702-33-550
D-3	702-33-710
Parcel #	702-34-240
702-15-620	702-34-250
702-15-630	702-34-260
702-15-610	702-34-270
	702-33-820
Sangre de Cristo Ranches	702-33-930
I - West side of south end of Greenbelt Trail	702-33-940
Parcel #	702-33-950
702-34-060	702-33-960
702-34-070	702-33-970
702-34-080	702-33-980
702-34-090	702-33-990
702-34-100	702-33-991
702-34-110	702-34-000

702-34-010  
702-34-040  
702-34-050  
702-34-320  
702-34-321

Sangre de Cristo Ranches

W-2

Parcel #

702-69-580  
702-76-700  
702-69-560  
702-69-550  
702-69-640  
702-69-470  
702-69-600  
702-69-190  
702-69-180  
702-69-170  
702-69-150  
702-69-140  
702-69-130  
702-69-120  
702-69-160  
702-69-210  
702-69-200  
702-69-340  
702-69-490  
702-69-460  
702-69-480  
702-69-510  
702-69-520  
702-69-530  
702-69-570  
702-69-590

**APPENDIX 4: RIO GRANDE RANCHOS AND RIVER RANCHES SUBDIVISIONS**

Rio Grande Ranchos Subdivision		715-44-230	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 16 LOT 2
Parcels that Border Costilla County Deeded Land		715-44-450	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 17 LOT 2
Southern End BLK 2, BLK 3, BLK 1, BLK4		715-44-610	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 18 LOT 2
		715-44-880	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 2
BLK 2		715-45-070	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 21
Parcel # Legal Description		715-45-110	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 20 LOT 2
715-01-600	R.G.R UNIT 2 BLK 0 LOT 46	715-45-260	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 21 LOT 2
715-40-920	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 1	715-45-490	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 22 LOT 2
715-40-930	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 2	715-45-750	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 23 LOT 2
715-40-940	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 3	715-46-000	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 24 LOT 2
715-40-650	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 4	715-46-230	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 25 LOT 2
715-40-970	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 6	715-46-410	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 26 LOT 2
715-40-980	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 7	715-46-560	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 27 LOT 2
715-40-990	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 8	715-46-670	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 28 LOT 2
715-41-000	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 9	715-46-710	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 29 LOT 2
715-41-010	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 10	715-46-840	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 30 LOT 2
715-41-020	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 11	715-46-950	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 31 LOT 2
715-41-040	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 13	715-47-140	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 32 LOT 2
715-41-041	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 14	715-47-360	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 33 LOT 2
715-41-050	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 15	715-47-680	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 36 LOT 2
715-41-080	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 18	715-47-960	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 38 LOT 2
715-41-090	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 19	715-48-220	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 39 LOT 2
715-41-100	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK2 LOT 20	715-48-450	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 40 LOT 2
715-41-550	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK4 LOT 2	715-48-690	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 41 LOT 2
715-41-690	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK5 LOT 2		
715-41-990	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK27LOT 2	BLK 3	
715-42-150	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK8 LOT 2	Parcel # Leal Description	
715-42-280	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK9 LOT 2	715-02-770	R.G.R UNIT 3 BLK 0 LOT 46
715-42-750	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK11 LOT 2	715-40-740	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 3
715-42-990	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 12 LOT 2	715-41-110	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 1
715-43-270	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 13 LOT 2	715-41-120	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 2
715-43-510	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 14 LOT 2	715-41-130	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 3
715-43-770	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 15 LOT 2	715-41-140	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 4

715-41-150	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 5	715-46-420	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 26 LOT 3
715-41-160	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 6	715-46-570	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 27 LOT 3
715-41-170	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 7	715-46-680	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 28 LOT 3
715-41-180	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 8	715-46-720	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 29 LOT 3
715-41-190	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 9	715-46-850	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 30 LOT 3 & 4
715-41-200	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 10	715-46-960	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 31 LOT 3
715-41-210	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 11	715-47-150	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 32 LOT 3
715-41-220	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 12	715-47-370	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 33 LOT 3
715-41-230	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 13	715-47-570	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 34 LOT 3
715-41-240	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 14	715-47-690	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 36 LOT 3
715-41-450	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 15	715-47-780	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 37 LOT 3
715-41-460	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 16	715-47-970	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 38 LOT 3
715-41-470	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 17	715-48-230	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 39 LOT 3
715-41-480	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 18	715-48-460	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 40 LOT 3
715-41-490	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 19	715-48-700	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 41 LOT 3
715-41-500	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 20		
715-41-510	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 21	BLK 1	
715-41-700	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 5 LOT 3	Parcel # Legal Description	
715-42-160	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 8 LOT 3	715-00-440	R.G.R UNIT 1 BLK 0 LOT 46
715-42-290	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 9 LOT 3	715-40-720	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 1
715-42-760	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 11 LOT 3	715-40-810	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 10
715-43-000	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 12 LOT 3	715-40-820	R.G.R.UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 11
715-43-280	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 13 LOT 3	715-40-880	R.G.R.UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 17
715-43-520	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 14 LOT 3	715-40-890	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 18
715-43-780	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 15 LOT 3	715-40-900	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 19
715-44-240	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 16 LOT 3	715-40-910	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 20
715-44-460	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 17 LOT 3	715-40-740	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 3
715-44-620	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 18 LOT 3	715-40-750	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 4
715-44-890	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 3	715-40-760	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 5
715-45-120	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 20 LOT 3	715-40-800	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 9
715-45-270	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 21 LOT 3	715-40-830	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 12
715-45-500	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 22 LOT 3	715-40-840	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 13
715-45-760	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 23 LOT 3	715-40-850	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 14
715-45-010	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 24 LOT 3	715-40-860	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 15
715-46-240	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 25 LOT 3	715-40-870	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 16

715-40-730	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 2	715-48-440	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 40 LOT 1
715-40-770	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 6	715-41-680	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 5 LOT 1
715-40-780	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 7	715-41-810	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 6 LOT 1
715-40-790	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 8	715-41-980	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 7 LOT 1
715-42-480	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 10 LOT 1	715-42-270	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 9 LOT 1
715-42-740	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 11 LOT 1	715-45-990	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 24 LOT 1
715-42-980	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 12 LOT 1	715-46-400	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 26 LOT 1
715-43-260	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 13 LOT 1	715-47-550	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 34 LOT 1
715-43-500	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 14 LOT 1	715-48-680	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 41 LOT 1
715-43-760	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 15 LOT 1		
715-44-220	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 16 LOT 1	BLK 4	
715-44-440	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 17 LOT 1	Parcel #	Legal Description
715-44-600	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 18 LOT 1	715-40-750	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 1 LOT 4
715-44-870	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 1	715-40-950	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 2 LOT 4
715-45-070	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 21	715-41-140	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 4
715-40-920	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 2 LOT 1	715-41-540	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 1
715-45-100	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 20 LOT 1	715-41-550	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 2
715-45-250	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 21 LOT 1	715-41-560	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 3
715-45-480	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 22 LOT 1	715-41-570	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 4
715-45-740	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 23 LOT 1	715-41-580	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 5
715-46-220	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 25 LOT 1	715-41-590	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 6
715-46-550	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 27 LOT 1	715-41-600	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 7
715-46-660	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 28 LOT 1	715-41-610	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 8
715-46-700	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 29 LOT 1	715-41-620	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 9
715-41-110	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 3 LOT 1	715-41-630	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 10
715-46-830	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 30 LOT 1	715-41-640	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 11
715-46-940	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 31 LOT 1	715-41-650	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 12
715-47-130	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 32 LOT 1	715-41-660	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 13
715-47-350	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 33 LOT 1	715-41-670	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 14
715-47-610	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 35 LOT 1	715-41-710	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 5 LOT 4
715-47-670	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 36 LOT 1	715-41-840	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 6 LOT 4
715-47-760	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 37 LOT 1	715-42-010	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 7 LOT 4
715-47-950	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 38 LOT 1	715-42-300	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 9 LOT 4
715-48-210	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 39 LOT 1	715-42-510	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 10 LOT 4
715-41-540	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 4 LOT 1	715-42-770	R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 11 LOT 4

715-43-010 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 12 LOT 4  
 715-43-290 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 13 LOT 4  
 715-43-530 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 14 LOT 4  
 715-43-790 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 15 LOT 4  
 715-44-250 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 16 LOT 4  
 715-44-470 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 17 LOT 4  
 715-44-900 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 19 LOT 4  
 715-45-130 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 20 LOT 4  
 715-45-280 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 21 LOT 4  
 715-45-510 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 22 LOT 4  
 715-45-770 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 23 LOT 4  
 715-46-020 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 24 LOT 4  
 715-46-250 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 25 LOT 4  
 715-46-430 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 26 LOT 4  
 715-46-580 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 27 LOT 4  
 715-46-690 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 28 LOT 4  
 715-46-721 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 29 LOT 4  
 715-46-850 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 30 LOT 3&4  
 715-46-970 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 31 LOT 4  
 715-47-160 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 32 LOT 4  
 715-47-380 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 33 LOT 4  
 715-47-580 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 34 LOT 4  
 715-47-640 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 35 LOT 4  
 715-47-700 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 36 LOT 4  
 715-47-790 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 37 LOT 4  
 715-47-980 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 38 LOT 4  
 715-48-240 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 39 LOT 4  
 715-48-470 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 40 LOT 4  
 715-48-710 R.G.R UNIT 46 BLK 41 LOT 4

Southern end - South to North

Unit 14

Parcel #

715-15-370

715-15-361

715-15-360

715-15-350

715-15-340

715-15-280

715-15-270

715-15-260

715-15-250

715-15-140

715-15-230

715-15-220

715-15-210

715-15-200

715-15-190

715-15-180

715-15-170

Rio Grande River Ranches

Southern End

Unit 1

Parcel #

716-15-910 = 62 lots

716-15-901 = 18 lots

719-00-410 = 2 lots

716-00-400 = 2 lots

716-00-390 = 1 lot

716-00-380 = 1 lot

716-15-901 = 39 lots

Rio Grande Ranchos and Rio Grande River Ranches  
Subdivisions

Potential County Priority Acquisition Parcels

Parcels Adjacent to County Deeded Land and River

Northern End

Unit 1

104 lots	715-15-930
20 Owners	715-15-920
Parcel #	715-15-910
716-15-921	715-15-900
Mount Blanca Estates U.S Dept of Interior/Fish & Wildlife	715-15-730
716-15-921	715-15-720
716-15-922	715-15-710
716-15-923	715-15-700
716-15-920	715-15-690
716-15-924	715-15-680
716-15-933	715-15-490
716-15-934	715-15-480
716-15-930	715-18-290
716-16-030	715-18-280
716-16-060	715-18-270
716-16-040	715-18-070
716-16-025	715-17-820
716-16-022	715-17-810
716-16-024	715-17-800
	715-17-790
Parcel #	715-17-780
716-16-026	715-17-770
716-16-023	715-18-850
716-16-021	715-18-840
716-16-020	715-18-830
716-16-050	715-18-820
	715-18-810
Unit 15, Unit 17, Unit 18	715-18-800
Parcel #	715-18-790
715-15-990	715-18-780
715-15-980	715-18-770
715-15-970	715-18-760
715-15-960	715-18-650
715-15-950	715-18-640
715-15-940	715-18-630

715-18-620  
715-18-610  
715-18-600  
715-18-590  
715-18-412  
715-18-420  
715-18-410  
715-18-400  
715-18-390  
715-18-380

Unit 39 - South end of Greenbelt

Parcel #

715-36-140  
715-36-130  
715-36-120  
715-36-110  
715-36-100  
715-36-090  
715-36-080  
715-36-070  
715-36-060  
715-36-030  
715-36-040  
715-36-030  
715-36-020  
715-36-010  
715-36-000  
715-35-991  
715-35-990  
715-35-980  
715-35-970  
715-35-960  
715-31-820  
715-31-950

715-31-960  
715-31-970

Unit 39

Parcel #

715-32-060  
715-32-050  
715-32-070  
715-32-080  
715-32-090  
715-32-100  
715-32-141  
715-32-150  
715-32-160  
715-32-170  
715-32-180  
715-31-990  
715-32-000  
715-32-050  
715-32-060  
715-31-970  
715-32-090  
715-31-940  
715-32-040  
715-32-070

Units 19 & 24

Parcel #

715-19-460  
715-19-470  
715-19-480  
715-19-490  
715-19-500  
715-19-510  
715-19-520



715-19-530	715-24-480
715-19-540	715-24-470
715-19-550	
715-19-610	Unit 25 & 26
715-19-620	Parcel #
715-19-630	715-25-320
715-19-640	715-25-310
715-19-650	715-25-300
715-19-660	715-25-290
715-19-670	715-25-280
715-19-680	715-25-270
715-19-690	715-25-260
715-19-700	715-25-250
715-19-710	715-25-240
715-19-720	715-25-230
715-19-730	715-25-220
715-19-740	715-25-210
715-24-650	715-25-200
715-24-640	715-25-190
715-24-620	715-25-180
715-24-210	715-25-170
715-24-600	715-25-150
715-24-590	
715-24-580	715-25-690
715-24-570	715-25-680
715-24-560	715-25-660
715-24-550	715-25-450
715-24-540	
715-24-532	
715-24-531	
715-24-530	
715-24-520	
715-24-510	
715-24-500	
715-24-490	

# APPENDIX 5: PUBLIC COMMENT MATERIALS

PRESORTED  
FIRST CLASS MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
SANT LUIS, CO 81152  
PERMIT #1



COSTILLA COUNTY  
P.O. Box 100  
352 Main Street  
San Luis, CO 81152  
WWW.COSTILLACOUNTY-CO.GOV

Costilla County  
Postal Patron

**SAVE THE DATE!!**  
Get Outdoors Costilla County!  
Friday, October 14, 2011  
10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Carpenter  
Ranch  
Free and Open to the Public

Raffle - Horseshoes - Volleyball - Food Bouncy  
House - Outdoor Skills Demonstrations

Visit [www.costillacounty-co.gov](http://www.costillacounty-co.gov)  
for more information.



Dear Costilla County resident,

In January 2011, Costilla County began planning a county-wide Trails, Recreation, & Open Space Master Plan in partnership with the National Park Service and other community organizations. This task force envisioned, "A system of trails, recreation resources, & protected lands & water systems that represent the unique natural & cultural heritage of the county to benefit its residents & visitors."

When completed, the document will identify the county's significant cultural & natural resources & provide strategies & recommendations for priority projects that will protect open space, create new recreational opportunities, improve existing parks, develop and improve trails, & preserve & showcase the county's unique heritage.

As part of the planning process, the partnership surveyed county residents & visitors in April & July 2011 to identify a list projects & opportunities that are of interest & priority to the community. We want to ensure that all voices and ideas are heard and incorporated into this planning effort - including yours!

Please give us your opinion by answering the questions on the back of this sheet & mailing it with the enclosed envelope or dropping it off at the County Commissioners Office, at 352 Main St., San Luis, CO.

Your ideas will help ensure that Costilla County is a place people will want to live and visit...AND by completing this survey, you will be entered in a drawing to win one of three \$50 Visa cards! Winners will be announced at the Get Outdoors Costilla County event.

Thank you for your participation!

1. Which of the following criteria should the county consider when prioritizing projects?

Mark all that apply.

Benefits/Impacts of the project, such as:  
\_\_\_ Increase opportunities for public use & enjoyment of open lands (allows access)

- \_\_\_ Protect wildlife areas
- \_\_\_ Protect scenic areas
- \_\_\_ Protect water resources (rivers, wetlands)
- \_\_\_ Protect agricultural land (farms and ranches)
- \_\_\_ Protect water rights (such as acequias)
- \_\_\_ Protect historic/cultural resources
- \_\_\_ Serve as an example for other projects

Costs/Feasibility of the project, such as:

- \_\_\_ Costs Less
- \_\_\_ Matching funds (projects which are already partly funded)
- \_\_\_ Cooperative land owners
- \_\_\_ Supportive partners
- \_\_\_ Need/opportunity for short term action (e.g. property is for sale)
- \_\_\_ Sustainability

2. How would you be willing to support open space & trails in Costilla County?

- \_\_\_ volunteering time to support their initial development (helping with grant proposals or support letters)
- \_\_\_ volunteering time to support their management
- \_\_\_ donating funds
- \_\_\_ increase local taxes or fees
- \_\_\_ participating in programs & events
- \_\_\_ protecting open space that you own

Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the following projects & opportunities would you like the county to

consider supporting? Mark all that apply.  
\_\_\_ Develop a picnic area in (or overlooking) La Vega

- \_\_\_ Improve existing county-owned parks
- \_\_\_ Fort Garland Park
- \_\_\_ Blanca Park
- \_\_\_ Rito Seco Park
- \_\_\_ Stabilization Recreation Area
- \_\_\_ Veteran's Park
- \_\_\_ Improve & maintain the Greenbelt Trail (in Sangre de Cristo Subdivision)
- \_\_\_ Develop safe bicycle routes along major Roadways
- \_\_\_ Expand the Fort Garland trail to the Town of Blanca
- \_\_\_ Consolidate subdivision parcels to create larger tracts of protected open space (for public access)
- \_\_\_ Identify opportunities for conservation easements to protect privately-owned open space (farms and ranches)
- \_\_\_ Develop youth service projects
- \_\_\_ Develop walking/driving tours of heritage sites in San Luis
- \_\_\_ Provide signage & information to direct residents & visitors to parks & trails & historic/cultural sites
- \_\_\_ Organize & maintain a County program for open space, parks, & trails
- \_\_\_ Establish & enforce rules & regulations for the use of parks & trails

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which of the following recreational areas would you like to see improved?

Please mark those that you feel you would use

- \_\_\_ Fort Garland Park
- \_\_\_ Blanca Park
- \_\_\_ Town of San Luis Park
- \_\_\_ Stabilization recreation area
- \_\_\_ Rito Seco Park
- \_\_\_ Veteran's Park
- \_\_\_ Smith Reservoir
- \_\_\_ Sanchez Reservoir
- \_\_\_ Mountain Home Reservoir
- \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Of the areas that you marked above, how would you like to see each one improved?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any additional comments or ideas that were not included here, please write them below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the following information if you wish to receive updates on the project.

Your name will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win one of three \$50 Visa cards.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your interest in the Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Project!

## Comment Card

### Costilla County Trails, Recreation and Open Space

The Costilla County Trails, Recreation and Open Space Task Force are seeking your input for a county plan. These questions are the best possible of what you would like to see, regardless of cost and land ownership constraints, and will initiate ideas for the plan. We are exploring funding options for the development, operation and maintenance of the trails, recreation and open space system. We would like to have your thoughts on the following questions.

1. Where do you live?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What types of parks and recreation facilities are you most interested in seeing developed/further developed?  
(rank your top three choices)  
\_\_\_\_ Recreation Center  
\_\_\_\_ Community parks (15-30 acres, service radius 2 miles)  
\_\_\_\_ Neighborhood parks (5-15 acres, service radius 0.5 miles)  
\_\_\_\_ Regional parks (Over 50 acres, service radius 25 mile)  
\_\_\_\_ District parks (30-50 acres, service radius 5 miles)  
\_\_\_\_ School parks  
\_\_\_\_ Pocket parks (< acres, service radius 0.25 miles)  
\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Specialty parks (ranging in size, usually for special recreational activities such as skateboarding or extreme mountain biking)
3. What would be your primary activity in a park? (rank your top three choices)  
\_\_\_\_ Picnicking  
\_\_\_\_ Basketball  
\_\_\_\_ Passive recreation (sit on a park bench)  
\_\_\_\_ Education/Interpretive  
\_\_\_\_ Sports (sports fields)  
\_\_\_\_ Playground  
\_\_\_\_ Walking & bicycling  
\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. What types of open space are you most interested in seeing protected? (rank your top three choices)
- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| ___ Natural scenic views             | ___ Farm and ranch land                  |
| ___ Wildlife habitat                 | ___ Local, passive open space            |
| ___ River/riparian corridors         | ___ Sloped lands                         |
| ___ Areas of biological significance | ___ Areas of fire or soil erosion hazard |
| ___ Heritage landscapes              | ___ Other _____                          |
8. Who should manage and operate the parks, open space and trail system?
- |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| ___ Combination of Towns and County |
| ___ Regional Authority              |
| ___ Costilla County                 |
| ___ Other _____                     |
9. How important is it to you that facilities are developed to showcase heritage to visitors (such as a historical walking trail through San Luis)?
- |          |            |         |
|----------|------------|---------|
| ___ High | ___ Medium | ___ Low |
|----------|------------|---------|
- Such as:
10. What specific trail, recreation and open space projects are you most interested in seeing developed?

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## APPENDIX 6: COLORADO OPEN LANDS DATA SOURCE FOR THE CONSERVATION PRIORITY ANALYSIS MODEL

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### Conservation Priority Analysis Mapping Model

#### Data and Methods

Colorado Open Lands worked with students at the University of Colorado Denver, supervised by Professor Amanda Weaver in the Geography and Environmental Sciences Department to collect data on different types of conservation values in Costilla County. Conservation values are divided into four groups: Habitat, Riparian, Agriculture, and Scenic values. The Habitat category is comprised of economically and ecologically important species. The Riparian category consists of all mapped water bodies. The Agricultural category contains prime and unique soils and irrigation ditch service areas and the Scenic Values category consists of a single layer with a buffer around the prominent highways in the County. Data in each category is further identified below by source.

Once the data was compiled, Colorado Open Lands converted all shape files (polygons) to raster files, in order to weight and add the cells. The individual cell size is 25 meters and the extent was the Costilla County boundary. As shown by the model illustration, the Habitat category contains three subcategories: ecologically important species, economically important species, and Potential Conservation Areas – the data within each subcategory is added to create a single raster and then the three subcategories are equally weighted and added to create the Habitat category (raster). This is done with each of the four major categories. The final model weights each of the four categories based on the community priorities identified by the TROS community survey. The result of the data set is a final raster layer which contains all of the combined, weighted data – each raster is a single number – the higher the number, the greater amount of conservation values within that 25 meter area.

#### **Habitat Data by Source:**

*Colorado Parks and Wildlife Natural Diversity Information Source FTP Server*

<http://www.arcgis.com/home/search.html?q=Colorado%20Parks%20and%20Wildlife&t=groups>

Bald Eagle Winter Concentration Area  
Peregrine Potential Nesting Sites  
Lynx Potential Habitat  
Elk Highway Crossing  
Elk Production Area  
Elk Winter Concentration Area  
Mule Deer Highway Crossing  
Mule Deer Resident Population  
Mule Deer Winter Range  
Turkey Winter Range  
Bighorn Overall Range  
Pronghorn Resident Population  
Pronghorn Winter Population

*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rocky Mountain Regional Planning Office*

Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Current Streams  
Southwest Willow Flycatcher Habitat

Gunnison Sage Grouse Suitable Habitat

*Colorado Natural Heritage Program*

<http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/exchange/request.asp>

Potential Conservation Areas (PCA)\*

\* A PCA represents CNHP's best estimate of the primary area supporting the long-term survival of targeted global- or state-rare species, infraspecies, or unique natural community

(these are describes in the Survey of Critical Wetlands and Riparian Areas in Southern Alamosa and Costilla Counties, San Luis Valley, Colorado available at

[http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2004/Southern Alamosa and Costilla Wetlands.pdf](http://www.cnhp.colostate.edu/download/documents/2004/Southern%20Alamosa%20and%20Costilla%20Wetlands.pdf))

**Riparian Data by Source:**

*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wetlands Inventory*

<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/Data-Download.html>

Wetlands\*

\*as defined in the following document: <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/Documents/Data-Collection-Requirements-and-Procedures-for-Mapping-Wetland-Deepwater-and-Related-Habitats-of-the-United-States.pdf>

*Colorado Division of Water Resources*

<http://water.state.co.us/datamaps/gisandmaps/pages/gisdownloads.aspx>

Rio Grande Basin Rivers (clipped to Costilla County with a 50 foot buffer from the river centerline)

**Agriculture Data by Source:**

*U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service*

<http://datagateway.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Prime Soil if Irrigated

Soil of Statewide Significance

*Colorado Decision Support Systems*

<http://cdss.state.co.us/GIS/Pages/GISDataHome.aspx>

Agricultural Ditch Service Area

**Scenic Data by Source:**

*Colorado Department of Transportation*

<http://www.coloradodot.info/>

Highways 159 and 160 were selected from the Highways data layer; a 60 foot buffer was created from the centerline of each highway