

Larimer County projects net \$156,309 in GOCO grants

Reporter-Herald staff
Loveland Reporter-Herald

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Great Outdoors Colorado on Thursday awarded three grants totaling \$156,309 to projects in Larimer County, including an \$84,309 habitat restoration grant for Loveland's Big Thompson River Habitat Restoration Project.

With that grant, the city will restore and enhance 7 acres of riverside land and "floodplain bench" on Medina's Crossing Natural Area, according to a GOCO press release. The area is just west of Namaqua Avenue.

A bench is a strip of relatively level or gently sloped land, above and running along a river, which can provide the benefits of a floodplain.

"The project's first step will be to discontinue the intensive cattle grazing that has impacted the river along this reach and contributed to the slow pace of the current 2013 flood recovery effort," the release said. "Then, the city will work with community volunteers and project partners to re-establish native vegetation through community planting events. This will help improve water quality, restore habitat for wildlife using the river corridor, stabilize soils, and reduce erosion."

The city of Loveland will contribute more than \$75,000 in matching cash and in-kind resources to the project.

GOCO also awarded \$18,000 in Youth Corps funding to Loveland for invasive species mitigation at Willow Bend Natural Area, and a \$54,000 Youth Corps grant to the Colorado State Forest Service for its Elkhorn Creek Forest Health Initiative.

Crews will work for two weeks at Willow Bend, an 81-acre property along the Big Thompson River in Loveland. It is estimated that the property contains 650 invasive Russian olive, Siberian elm and tamarisk trees, the GOCO release stated. Larimer County Conservation Corps will remove and treat these non-native trees.

The \$54,000 Youth Corps grant to the Colorado State Forest Service will support Larimer County's Elkhorn Creek Forest Health Initiative at Ben Delatour Scout Ranch. The site has heavy fire fuel loads, putting it at high risk for wildfire. With the help of the GOCO funding, the Forest Service will employ youth corps crews for six weeks to reduce forest density and hazardous fuels on the 3,200-acre property.

Great Outdoors Colorado invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and open spaces, the release says.

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Larimer County commissioners look for options instead of Devil's Backbone fee

A vote is scheduled Thursday

By Hans Peter

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Posted: Tue Dec 18 19:07:35 MST 2018

Months after proposed fee adjustments to Larimer County parks and open spaces suggested a day-pass fee to the Devil's Backbone, Larimer County Commissioners — and outspoken citizens — continue to discuss what's best for the Loveland hangout.

Commissioners held a public hearing Tuesday regarding fee adjustments for parks and open spaces, most notably, the proposed \$6 day fee to attend the Devil's Backbone. Commissioners are scheduled to vote on the proposed fee structure 1:30 p.m. Dec. 20 at the Larimer County Courthouse Offices in Fort Collins.

Tuesday's meeting heard comment from a handful of Larimer County residents, most of whom opposed any fee at the Devil's Backbone, which has remained free for 18 years. Nearly 20 people had gathered in the Hearing Room of the county building at 200 W. Oak Street in Fort Collins.

One resident, Misty Johnson, said she and her children "practically live" at the Devil's Backbone in the summer, as it marks one of the only free things to do near her home in Loveland.

"It's getting harder to explain to my kids why we can't go on walks for free," she said, noting that just about every other open space or park requires a fee to enter. "To be honest, this is something we wouldn't be able to afford to do as much as we do now."

She noted the proposed "Bison Pass," an annual pass that would cost low-income families only \$45, half of the annual resident pass of \$90. She said an annual pass of any dollar amount would likely strain finances for many.

Other residents echoed her words, saying a new fee — in combination with the passing of the open spaces tax measure — would be like paying for the recreational spaces twice. Some said the fee would act as a barrier to low-income families and would create disincentives for volunteer programs.

However, a few others commented that some kind of fee was necessary to keep area like the Backbone in good standard, but that it might be gleaned from other demographics, donations, or volunteer programs.

County Commissioner Tom Donnelly, a Loveland resident, said that until the county could exhaust all possible options, he would likely not vote for a Backbone fee implementation. He also noted that among all the fee adjustments, the Backbone fee appeared to be the only point of contention in the months of talks and public hearings leading to the end of the year.

"I want to look at possible partnerships," Donnelly said, saying the city of Loveland or even the Thompson School District may be willing to look at financial options in the future.

Commissioner Sean Dougherty said a fee might be a necessary pill to swallow, but said he was also "interested in what we can hear if we open it up."

And Commissioner Steve Johnson said, after hearing comment, that the annual senior citizen open space pass could be increased to help cover the funds needed to keep up the Backbone. If the senior pass were increased from \$45 to \$60, that would bring in an estimated \$20,000 more per year.

That pass, in tandem with the Bison Pass, would mean that senior citizens would be eligible for either, based on income.

"I've also been very concerned about the fact that this is one of the free things for people to do in the county," Johnson said. "An active fee would be a last resort."

Dougherty said it would be worth looking into giving those buying an annual pass the option to donate more.

"I think that would really help the bottom line," Daugherty said.

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Hermit Park Open Space Seasonal Closure

Dec 18, 2018



The seasonal closure of Larimer County's Hermit Park Open Space, located 2 miles southeast of Estes Park, will begin effective Thursday, December 20, 2018.

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The last day the public may visit Hermit Park this year is Wednesday, December 19.

Hermit Park will remain closed during the winter months because of wintry weather conditions and protection of wintering range for big game animals, such as elk. Hermit Park will reopen to the public on March 1, 2019, weather dependent.

All dates are weather dependent and subject to change. For questions, please call the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources Administrative Offices at (970) 619-4570.

Boaters to pay fee for aquatic nuisance species inspections

Horsetooth diverted most mussel-infected boats in 2018

By Pamela Johnson

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Loveland Reporter-Herald

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Inspectors at Horsetooth Reservoir west of Fort Collins stopped 11 boats contaminated with invasive mussels from launching on the water — the most of any lake or reservoir in the state in 2018.

Overall, Larimer County decontaminated more than 1,000 boats, an increase of at least 300 from prior years as resource specialists from across the state strive to prevent the devastating and costly mussels from taking hold in Colorado.

This year, boaters will help pay for the inspection program that, so far, has kept Colorado waters clean.

Starting Jan. 1, all Colorado residents will pay \$25 for an Aquatic Nuisance Species Stamp when they register their boat for the year; the stamp must be purchased before the boat launches on any waters in 2019, and boaters must have an electronic or printed receipt on the boat.

The fee is double for boaters from out of state, \$50.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials believe that the new stamp, approved by the legislature last year, will cover at least half of the cost of the statewide inspection program, according to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website. Additional revenue comes from severance taxes.

Colorado implemented mandatory boat inspections in 2008 after larvae from invasive mussels were located in eight Colorado reservoirs and lakes. No adult zebra or quagga mussels have been found in Colorado, though they have devastated infrastructure and damaged waters in other states.

To prevent millions of dollars in damage to the habitat and water systems, trained inspectors search each boat before it launches on Colorado waters, decontaminating those with signs of mussels and paying extra attention to those coming from out-of-state waters.

Though no adult mussels have been found in Colorado, they have been confirmed just 150 feet over the border in Kansas and in many large, popular lakes including Lake Powell, Lake Mead and Lake Havasu.

Lake Powell is heavily infected and a popular destination for Colorado boaters, noted Ken Brink Jr., visitor services manager for the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources. He believes this has caused a ripple effect in Larimer County with more decontaminations and mussels found on more boats.

For the 2018 season inspectors examined 37,075 boats at Horsetooth, found 11 that contained invasive mussels and decontaminated 635 vessels to ensure that the species do not take hold here. Carter Lake logged 20,039 total inspections, one boat with mussels and 397 decontaminations.

Brink mentioned an increase in mussel boats and decontaminations within Larimer County during the past boating season.

"A huge number of boaters that are leaving Lake Powell are showing up at our waterways," said Brink. "It's reminding us how important our program is."

Total inspection numbers are not available for 2018, but through 2017, the state had intercepted a total of 144 infected boats since the program began in 2008, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife. In 2017 alone, inspectors set a state record of intercepting 26 watercraft that contained invasive mussels.

When the state first implemented the inspection program, Colorado Parks and Wildlife covered the entire \$4.5 million cost, primarily from severance taxes. Two years ago, that revenue stream lessened after a Colorado Supreme Court ruling, leading wildlife officials to scramble to find funding for the inspection program.

For the past two years, different agency partners have helped cover a portion of the inspection costs while the state searched for a more sustainable source of money. At Larimer County's reservoirs — Horsetooth and Carter — the county pitched in \$100,000 as did Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Northern Water, which distributes the water stored in the reservoirs. Each partner paid an equal share.

This year, Brink does not yet know how much funding will be coming from the state, though he is expecting to see the state budget soon. State officials, he said, have told Larimer County they will be pleased when the numbers are finalized. With the new revenue stream and severance taxes once again picking up, Brink is expected good news from the state.

Brink added, "Our hope is that Colorado Parks and Wildlife's support for this program will return more to normal."

Larimer County stepped up to help cover the gap because of the importance of the program, officials said in past years. And this year, they are emphasizing that importance in another way — by increases fines to the maximum \$300 for all violations to aquatic nuisance species rules.

But, Brink added, most boaters follow the rules and do what is required to protect Colorado waters.

"They're the main reason we're keeping these waters clean," Brink said.

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