

**JEFFERSON COUNTY OPEN SPACE AT 50 YEARS**

We begin with a quote from Shakespeare to help us enter with an open space framework. “And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

In the fall of 1971, Carol Karlin, a Jeffco League member, suggested that the LWV of Jefferson County spearhead a citizen’s group to promote a plan for the preservation of open space. Based on local and state positions of general support for parks and open space and following member discussion at unit meetings, the Jeffco League members endorsed the idea and formed the nucleus of the PLAN Jeffco group which developed, promoted and helped pass the resolution providing for a one-half of one percent sales tax for planning, developing necessary access to, acquiring, maintaining and preserving open space and historic structures, and developing paths and trails. The 1980 amendment passed by voters allowed the expenditure of open space funds for construction, acquisition and maintenance of park and recreational capital improvements. In 1998 Jeffco voters approved a \$160 million bond issue for the acquisition of priority projects.

Since 1972 League members have closely followed the Open Space Program with member updates and action such as addressing Master Plans, amendments to the OS resolution, the 1986 AdHoc Committee, support of the 1999 Bonds issue, and cosponsoring programs with PLAN Jeffco.

The Mission of the Jefferson County Open Space Program is to: *Preserve* open space and parkland, *Protect* park and natural resources, and *Provide* healthy, nature-based experiences. It is under the direction of Tom Hoby, Parks Director. He also oversees the Boettcher Mansion and the CSU Extension Service. The Open Space Division has 131 full-time employees. In 2020, with limited opportunities due to COVID-19, 870 volunteers accomplished 14,730 hours.

The Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) is responsible for making recommendations to the County Commissioners regarding all aspects of the Open Space program. The members are appointed for three-year terms by the County Commissioners as specified in the 1972 resolution. Appointments are now limited to three successive terms. To observe OSAC meetings go to: <https://www.jeffco.us/1581/Advisory-Committee>.

**2021 OSAC Members**

Kathleen Staks	Chair	County	9/30/23	Mike Dungun	City	9/30/22
Janet Shangraw	Vice Chair	Rec Dist	9/30/24	Kally Wasserbach	At Large	9/30/22
Jeremy Hakes	Secretary	City	9/30/24	Amy Turney	At Large	9/30/22
John Litz	Secretary	City	9/30/23	Chris O'Keefe	County	9/30/22
	Pro Tem				Planning	
Mandy Jeffcoat		County	9/30/24	Sarah Gomach	At Large	9/30/23

**Acquisitions**

Over its 50-year history, JCOS has acquired 60,291 acres for \$398,166,417. Unincorporated Jefferson County Open Space manages 28 Open Space Parks (56,000 acres) and more than 252 miles of trails.

Cities Total		11,027.3 Acres
Arvada	2,652.2 Acres	
Broomfield	8.0 Acres	
Edgewater	15.1 Acres	

Golden	94.4 Acres	
Lakewood	2,637.6 Acres	
Morrison	1.4 Acres	
Mountain View	.3 Acres	
Westminster	5,089.3 Acres	
Wheat Ridge	346.1 Acres	
Recreational Districts		1,539.8 Acres
Other (e.g. Crown Hill)		399.1 Acres
Unincorporated		47,324.8 Acres
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>60,291.0 Acres</b>

Budget

The first full year of the program, 1974, \$3.7 million dollars was collected. The total sales tax revenue for 2020 was \$54,502,953. Half of the revenues are allocated based on automobile registrations with approximately one-third of the total revenue allocated to the cities. Recreation districts receive no direct allocation, but do receive grants.

The total projected 2021 budget for Unincorporated Jeffco Open Space is \$43.9 million (includes sales tax, interest, fees and grants). The budget line items include:

Bond debt retirement	\$ 4.5 million (The debt payoff is anticipated to occur in 2024.)
Stewardship & Operations	\$ 18.7 million
Capital Projects	\$ 11.6 million
Acquisitions	\$ 7.0 million
Trails Partnership Program	\$ 3.0 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 44.7 million</b>

- Stewardship and Operations funds are for programs by staff and volunteers to engage with the community; treating open space lands for harmful and invasive weeds, reducing tree density and fuel sources, habitat restoration and building natural surface trails.
- Capital Projects mainly target expanding or improving trailheads: parking facilities, restrooms, signage.
- Acquisition budget is to preserve an additional 3,000 acres of public open space and parkland. The criteria are:
  - Access and Nature-based Experiences,
  - Natural Resource attributes,
  - Scenic Quality, Heritage Preservation, Connectivity, Plan Congruence, and Financial Considerations.
- The Trails Partnership Program is new in 2021 and takes the place of the Local Grant Program. It is available to partners that manage public land and/or provide public park and recreation services in Jefferson County. Eligible projects include trail construction, maintenance and amenities, and must be included in an approved plan identified in the Jeffco Trails Plan or improve safety, access and connectivity of Jeffco trails or green spaces. JCOS will fund up to 25% of local or up to 50% of regional trail projects.

JCOS was awarded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grants of \$5,017,124 for 2021 for the Peaks to Plains Trail in Clear Creek Canyon as well as a Trail Courtesy Study with Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks.

### 2020-2025 Greenprint

The Greenprint is a new name which is synonymous with a Master Plan.

There are 10 goals in the Greenprint:

1. Visitor Stewardship and Courtesy  
“The increased visitor-ship during the pandemic has accelerated the need for Stewardship and Courtesy.” The goal includes interacting with 350,000 park visitors over the 5-year period to share stewardship and safety information.
2. Information Sharing  
Engaging community members in conversations that will positively impact our environment. Implementing a bilingual communication program. Increase the use of the JCOS website and social media platforms.
3. Personal Involvement  
Inspire community members to share their talents and energy by cumulatively volunteering 270,000 hours over the 5-year period.
4. Land Acquisition (Land prices will control the number of acres.)  
Add 3,000 acres of public open space and parkland, distributed geographically throughout the county. Strengthen relationships and communications with landowners. (PLAN Jeffco would like to push for 5,000 acres.)
5. War on Weeds  
Treat 48,000 acres for harmful and invasive floral species, focusing on the parks with the highest infestations. The JCOS Natural Resource team and volunteers use many methods for treating weeds including hand-pulling, mowing and use of herbicides. Prior to building new trails, JCOS will be pre-treating the area where the trail will be built. Additionally, educational campaigns coupled with boot brushes at trailheads are important components to reduce the spread of weeds.
6. Forest Health  
Update JCOS Forest Health Plan and reduce tree density and fuel sources on 1,000 of the 17,000 acres of forested lands. The Natural Resources Team is developing the Plan in concert with a consultant. JCOS has been an active partner in fire mitigation. County Commissioner Leslie Dahlkemper chairs the Wildfire Risk Reduction Task Force.
7. Habitat Restoration  
Restore 325 acres of land disturbed by human activities and natural events.
8. Easy and Equitable Access  
Applying guidance from the Jeffco Countywide Trails Plan, collaborate with the cities and districts to provide access to a trail or green space within a 10-minute walk or drive from home.
9. Park System Trail Expansion  
Build 50 miles of new trails and increase designated use trails. Implement 9 of the 20 community trails proposed in 2018.
10. Quality Visitor Experience  
Implement visitor experience standards at all 27 Open Space parks and improve or develop 17 trailheads. New or improved restrooms and parking lots.

Here is a quote from Aboriginal law to offer us a land stewardship frame of mind: “Take care of the land, and it will take care of you. Take what you need from the land, but need what you take.”

### Education Programs

JCOS plans to start conducting in-person programs with Staff and Volunteers in June, 2021.

1. Youth Program offered for ages 6-12, but open to all ages  
Junior Ranger, a fun, nature-based activity to help children and their families learn about what it's like to be a park ranger in JCOS.
2. Nature Programs for all ages, geared for adults
  - a. Mother's Day Flower Hike
  - b. Nature Journal Club held monthly, with a different theme for each month. This class is taught by a naturalist or park ranger. Participants will learn sketching techniques and walk away with their own unique journal pages.

Evergreen Mountain Area Historical Society protects and preserves and promotes the history of the local mountain area communities in Jefferson County. The society provides volunteers and financing for educational programs and summer day camp at Hiwan Heritage Park and Museum. They own and insure the collection inside the Hiwan Heritage Museum.

### JCOS Projects

#### Clear Creek Canyon

In 1992, PLAN Jeffco proposed the acquisition of land in the canyon to essentially protect it from rim to rim, 10,900 acres. In 2005, JCOS envisioned a 10-foot wide, multiuser, concrete trail and parking lots through the entire Jefferson County segment of Clear Creek Canyon. Four miles of such a trail (\$25 million) were completed in 2017, extending from the west, Tunnel 5/Hwy 119 to Mayhem Gulch and the Big Easy trailheads on the east. Currently, work is proceeding on the Mouth of Clear Creek Canyon, described as a gateway to the canyon park. There will be a major trailhead at Hwy 6/58 and Hwy 93 with recreational facilities, parking lots and restrooms and 1.75 miles of trail to Tunnel One. The project will include a 0.5-mile restoration of the Welch Ditch wooden flume accessible from a new pedestrian bridge at the Tunnel One parking lot. (\$15 million) Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grants of \$5 and \$2 million respectively have been available for these trails. Both segments are part of the regional Peaks to Plains Trail, a 65-mile route from Loveland Pass/Eisenhower Tunnel to the South Platte River.

#### JCOS and Friends of Dinosaur Ridge

Dinosaur Ridge and the Visitor Center are within JCOS Matthews/Winters Park and part of the greater Westtracks Recreation Area. The Friends of Dinosaur Ridge (FODR) provide education and preservation services at the Ridge. Most of the interpretive fossil sites on the ridge reside within the right of way of Alameda Parkway, a county owned road that is closed to public traffic. Increased visitation has led to a need for better coordination of goals and objectives between FODR and JCOS. The Dinosaur Ridge Master Plan was prepared in November 2018. [Dinosaur Ridge Master Plan \(PDF\)](#)

In February 2019, the J.C. Board of County Commissioners approved a land exchange that paves the way for a new dinosaur visitor center to be built on Alameda Parkway at Rooney Road and provides \$750,000 over time to pay for it. JCOS will trade the existing visitor center and land (1.38 acres) on the north side of Alameda for 3.13 acres the developer owns on the south side.

Cities/Open Space

The total 2020 allocation to cities was \$16,999,472. The amount each city received, minus a 2% administrative fee is given below:

Arvada*	(117,759)	\$5,389,361	Littleton*	(2,653)	\$101,484
BowMar	(300)	\$10,683	Morrison	(436)	\$16,024
Edgewater	(5,352)	\$197,628	Mountain View	(536)	\$21,365
Golden	(20,593)	\$838,582	Westminster*	(44,162)	\$1,954,912
Lakeside	(8)	\$5,341	Wheat Ridge	(31,273)	\$1,442,148
Lakewood	(158,410)	\$6,681,953			

\* 2019 population estimates of residents in Jefferson County (3 cities are in more than one county)

Over the next 5 years, cities can expect to receive about \$102 million in allocations. All cities except Bow Mar and Lakeside receive their funds monthly. Neither Bow Mar or Lakeside have made any expenditures and have accrued \$663,550 and \$353,572 respectively over the 50-year history of the program. Superior has land, but no residents in Jefferson County.

Our committee asked the major cities in Jefferson County 10 questions relating to their use of JCOS funds. Not surprisingly, there was a variety of responses.

**Arvada, Golden, and Morrison**

All three cities find that the monthly allocations they receive directly from JCOS are working well. Arvada tracks and incorporates their monthly funds into the city-wide 10-year financial model. This enables them to plan ahead. Both Arvada and Morrison include their allocations in the Parks budget. Golden has a separate Open Space Capital Project Fund.

How are the funds being used? The focus has been on park maintenance and trail enhancements as opposed to acquisitions. Golden, however, purchased the DeLong property in 2017 for the creation of a neighborhood park. Arvada and Morrison haven't made land acquisitions in the last five years. Arvada's Deputy Director, Department of Vibrant Community and Neighborhoods, Enessa Janes, has suggested that "the county be more actively involved in the municipal property acquisition process (either through a bond or another program)." Morrison hasn't used its OS funding for 10 years, saving them for Open Space enhancement or trail improvements. Golden has an Open Space Master Plan. Included in this plan is the development of DeLong Park and annual tree planting.

The cities monitor these funds in a similar fashion. Arvada monitors the city's OS funds through the city's budget cycle, Golden uses accounting management software, and Morrison tracks OS project funds through line items in the Parks Department ledger.

Arvada and Morrison participated in the 2021 Trails Partnership Program, a grant program. Morrison has done a feasibility analysis at Mount Falcon, which was funded by JCOS grant monies. Golden hasn't participated yet but is working cooperatively with JCOS on several trail plans. i.e. South Table Mountain and Peaks to Plains.

The top three priorities for each city are listed below:

Arvada:

1. expanding open space spines, creating a web by connecting to other creeks, canals, and open spaces in a contiguous and regionally-focused manner.
2. Using funds to improve the ecological health of our open space network and waterways to benefit wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation destinations.
3. Using funds to connect every resident to the park, trail, and open space system with routes designed for biking, walking, and active transportation.

Golden:

1. Open Space Master Plan
2. DeLong Park construction
3. Annual tree planting

Morrison:

1. Mount Falcon Morrison Trailhead improvements
2. Trails
3. Park improvements

### **Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, and Westminster**

For Lakewood and Wheat Ridge, receiving their allocation monthly has removed the need to petition for the funds after expenditures, thereby relieving cash flow issues for other City funds and allowing them to meet their spending commitments on a timely basis. It reduces paperwork significantly and has also enabled them to better track resources and project revenue. Westminster allocates funds to the various Parks Recreation and Open Space Accounts in January, based on forecasted revenues from Jeffco. The monthly allocation allows them to confirm those forecasts and make timely adjustments.

Wheat Ridge's funds are addressed in a separate restricted fund, known as Fund 32, or the Open Space Fund. A member of the executive management team reviews any expenditures over \$5,000 to ensure the expenditure is appropriate. The Finance Division reviews all spending on a monthly basis. Lakewood's Open Space revenues are tracked and budgeted separately from other funds used for park operations. The use of open space funds is monitored through the budgeting process yearly, and by the designated manager of open space and conservation trust funds. Westminster's Jeffco tax funds are allocated to specific Capital Improvement (CIP) funds that are tied to projects which meet the requirements of the tax and are only utilized in Jefferson County.

Wheat Ridge's 2021 Open Space funds are being used for Phase II of Prospect Park (including a new large pavilion, parking improvements, a fishing dock and additional park amenities), an update of the Open Space Management Plan, general park/trail/open space improvement projects as well as salaries for seven park maintenance positions and two forestry positions. Previously, funds were used for Prospect Park Phase I renovations, replacement of the Bass Lake retaining wall, reconstruction of Johnson Park Trail, replacement of the irrigation system at Panorama & Stites Park and the completion of the Anderson Park renovation 2E bond project.

Wheat Ridge was awarded \$466,141 through the Trails Partnership Program to connect the Clear Creek Trail to a multi-use path that will be constructed on the east side of Wadsworth Blvd as part of a larger Wadsworth improvement project.

Wheat Ridge's top priorities are the Open Space Management Plan revision and Prospect Park Phase II projects, as well as new trail construction, park/trail maintenance projects and maintaining their level of service through funding critical positions.

Lakewood's funds are used for all aspects of their parks and open space programs, including maintenance of properties acquired with open space funds, acquisition of park and open space properties, and development and improvement of the City park and open space properties. Since 1972, the City's park and open space inventory has increased from 217 acres (1.2% of the incorporated area of City) to over 7,181 acres (25.2% of the incorporated area of the City). Most of that increase has been made with the use of open space funds. Open Space funds are used to maintain many sites, including Wm F Hayden Park, the Bear Creek Greenbelt, Addenbrooke Park, and O'Kane Park. Since 2016, the City has acquired the Taylor Open Space (67 acres), the Armstrong property along Bear Creek (6.7 acres), Toteve property (.96 Acres with Edgewater and the County), and the sunset park expansion (4.68 acres). In addition to their allocation, Lakewood has received the following open space grants since 2016: Carmody Park Improvements - \$700,000; Two Creek Trail acquisition and development - \$63,659; Taylor Acquisition - \$1,485,000.

Lakewood is participating in the Trails Partnership Program in 2021 with the planned renovation and improvement of the Bear Creek Trail, including the widening of the shared use path and adding a gravel alternative trail, along with improved rest rooms, signage, and safety improvements.

The top priorities for Lakewood's use of Open Space funds are to maintain the properties acquired with open space funds, make improvements to enhance public access, and to respond to increased public use of outdoor facilities.

Westminster's 2020 funds were used to plan the nature trail and associate permits and crossings at Standley Lake. This trail will be constructed in 2021 using Jeffco Open Space funds. Funds were also used to upgrade and improve irrigation systems in their parks and will be used to replace playground surfaces and build new post tension basketball courts. The City is in negotiations on acquisitions that, if successful, will likely be funded with Jefferson County Tax dollars. In conjunction with JCOS (\$900,000), Westminster purchased the 300-acre Woman Creek Reservoir property along Indiana, across from Rocky Flats.

Westminster is working with JCOS on the planning process for several local and regional trail opportunities.

Westminster's top priorities are to maintain what they have, acquire new lands and provide new opportunities for recreational enjoyment of lands while protecting the natural resources.

#### **Mountain View, Edgewater, and Littleton**

Mountain View's Open Space funds are a separate line item in their budget. The funds are primarily used for the maintenance of their small park south of the Town Hall. They are looking to purchase additional land north of the Town Hall.

Edgewater chose not to respond, not from a lack of interest, but due to a lack of time to respond.

Littleton's Jefferson County area falls over South Platte Park and Trailmark, so the use of their Open Space funds supports those areas. Littleton's top three priorities include maintenance, capital, and operations. In the future,

Littleton plans to participate in the Trails Partnership Program. Open Space funds are reported in a separate fund from Littleton's Parks budget. Proposed projects/expenditures are part of Littleton's budget discussion each year. No new acquisitions have been made in the last 5 years and to their knowledge, no additional funds from JCOS have been received.

#### PLAN Jeffco

PLAN Jeffco (PJ) is the county-wide volunteer citizen's group that organized and drafted the Open Space Resolution that resulted in the formation of the Jefferson County Open Space Program in 1972. It currently functions as a monitoring group, observing meetings of the Open Space Advisory Committee and keeping citizens informed about the Open Space Program.

- 1978, PJ reorganized to defeat three ballot proposals that threatened the Open Space Program.
- 1980, PJ organized a campaign that defeated two ballot questions that would have reduced the funds available to JCOS. The third ballot question, allowing use of sales tax funds for capital improvements, was approved.
- 1986, PJ requested an Ad Hoc Committee to review the use of Open Space funds because of the controversy over intensive recreational development at Clement Park. After more than a year of deliberation, it was determined that unincorporated Jeffco Open Space would limit its scope to acquisition and passive recreation development.
- 1989, PJ proposed an active acquisition program (as opposed to just purchasing lands offered to them) targeting major landmarks: Clear Creek, the Mountain Backdrop, the Table Mountains, Natural Areas and Recreational lands.
- 1992, for the first time, PJ used the OS nomination process to submit a multi-property acquisition proposal for the entire Clear Creek Corridor.
- 1998 PJ proposed the issuance of bonds to be used for the acquisition of land. PJ led the \$160 million bond campaign – which passed with 74% of the vote. The bond money has now all been spent.

PJ has acted as moderator in several policy disputes, hosted public forums, dinners with the County Commissioners and Open Space Staff and candidate meetings. (The Jeffco League has co-hosted several functions with PJ.) PJ's newsletter and website ([www.planjeffco.org](http://www.planjeffco.org)) keep members and the public up-to-date on Open Space activities. In May-June, 2021 it offered a seven-week "Stewardship Academy."

PJ continues its mission to maintain the Open Space Program with its original intent and to initiate new ideas. PLAN Jeffco is a 501c3 and depends on dues and contributions for its support.

#### LWV Jeffco Open Space Position Summary

- Support for a county-wide Open Space Program funded by a sales tax.
- Support of procedures and criteria for the use of Open space funds for development.
- Five standards have been set forth:
  - priorities for the use of open space funds
  - focus on the concept that the program is county-wide
  - the continuation of the role of park and recreation districts
  - a mechanism for review of the open space resolution every two to six years
  - and that unincorporated Jefferson County Open Space fund expenditures be reviewed by the Open Space Advisory Committee or a subcommittee of OSAC.
- Development and maintenance of park and recreational capital improvements should be compatible with the concept of open space and meet adopted criteria. There are several areas of primary importance:
  - an appropriate agency should review each request for funds and make recommendations,

- citizen input on the type and scope of development should be ensured,
- and the impact of the development on the overall program should be considered.
- There are two standards of secondary importance:
  - consideration of the amount already spent in the area for acquisition and development
  - consideration of facility development standards.

We leave you with this inspiring quote from William Cullen Bryant: "Go forth under the open sky and listen to nature's teachings."

Committee: Nancy von Burske, Jackie Murdock, Bette Seeland

#### SOURCES

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Vicky Gits, Dinosaur Ridge (Matthews-Winters Park) Land Exchange Goes Forward, PLAN Jeffco Update, March, 2019.

Nancy York, Planning Supervisor, Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS), 700 Jefferson County Pkwy #100, Golden, CO 80401

John Litz, JCOS Advisory Committee, Lakewood, Colorado

Ross William, Facilities Planner, Planning and Construction, Lakewood, CO.

Gina Barton, Budget & Finance Supervisor, JCOS, 700 Jefferson County Pkwy #100, Golden CO 80401

Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office, 2019 population within counties.

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Stacy Turner, CPRP, Executive Assistant/Department Liaison, City of Golden

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League of Women Voters of Jefferson County, CO, Program and History 1953-2020, A Guide to Public Policy Positions