ELBERT COUNTY
OPEN SPACE STUDY

A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING HIGH VALUE LANDS FOR OPEN SPACE

OCTOBER 2016

an OPEN SPACE STUDY in partnership with

ELBERT COUNTY, CO
DOUGLAS LAND CONSERVANCY
DESIGNWORKSHOP
OVERVIEW

• What is an Open Space Study and Why Now
• Who Was Involved and Process
• The Case for Open Space
• Layer Upon Layer
• Priorities and Approaches
• Q & A
WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STUDY?

**It is a …**

- Tool for Elbert County to better understand areas that contain high open space value in order to protect your region’s rural character

- Method of identifying opportunities and guidance for future open space conservation, habitat protection, and recreation connectivity

- Resource for landowners to understand options in face of changing economies and growth pressures
WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE STUDY?

It is **not** a …

- Plan for public acquisition of private lands
- Method of identifying individual parcels
- Means of restricting private property rights or development potential
WHY NOW?

• **Community development pressures**
  • Predicted to be fastest growing county in Colorado over next 5 years – potentially doubling in population by 2030
  • Residential subdivision development serving Denver, Parker, Castle Rock, and Colorado Springs

• **Energy development pressures**
  • Largest wind energy project in Colorado – 300-400 turbines (440 ft tall) and 90 miles of transmission lines (130 ft tall) – approximately half in eastern Elbert County
  • Traditional oil and gas exploration (southern end of Niobrara / Denver-Julesburg Basin)

• Opens new funding opportunities and aligned with Comprehensive Plan update process
WHO WAS INVOLVED

• Elbert County Planning Department

• Douglas Land Conservancy (non-profit 501(c)3)

• Design Workshop (planning consultant)

• Stakeholder Focus Groups
WHO WAS INVOLVED

• Douglas Land Conservancy
  • Non-partisan, non-profit land trust dedicated to the protection and conservation of the natural character, habitat, and open space of the central front range region of Colorado, including Douglas County and surrounding areas
  
  • Made up of concerned citizens and based in Castle Rock since 1987
  
  • Recognizing the importance of a regional approach in land conservation has recently broadened its focus to support surrounding counties, including Jefferson and Elbert
  
  • In 2014, awarded a grant by a local family foundation to help develop the open space vision study
FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS (JUNE 2016)

• **Recreation, Education, and Activities**
  - Peaceful Valley Scout Ranch, Magness Adventure Camp, Plains Conservation Center, Douglas/Elbert Horse Council, 4H

• **Agricultural Working Lands and Natural Resources**

• **Community Development**
  - Town of Elizabeth (Parks and Recreation, Community Development), Kiowa Public Works, Simla Public Works
PROCESS

- Data Gathering and Preliminary Analysis
- County Tour and Reconnaissance
- Stakeholder Engagement (Focus Group Meetings)
- Revised Analysis and Development of Priorities
- Documentation of the Study
THE CASE FOR OPEN SPACE

AGRICULTURAL WORKING LANDS

RECREATION

WILDLIFE / HABITAT

SCENIC QUALITY
THE CASE FOR OPEN SPACE

- **Economic**
  - Preserve existing agricultural economies
  - Build on equine facilities ($125M between Elbert and Douglas Counties)
  - Maintain or enhance property values (10-15%)
  - Capitalize on recreation/tourism economy ($21B statewide)

- **Community**
  - Identity and continuation of rural way of life
  - Citizen’s health and wellness
  - Connection to nature for children

- **Environmental**
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Water resources protection (surface and aquifer)
  - Scenic value (open plains, pine forests, Pikes to Longs)
LAYER UPON LAYER

- Gather and analyze multiple layers of GIS data and information from local, state, and federal sources
  - Natural Features and Agricultural Working Lands
  - Scenic Quality and Visibility
  - Character of Parcel (size and adjacency)

- Assign ranking of Low, Medium, or High to different characteristics
  - Example: Wildlife Nesting/Calving Sites = High, Winter Range = Medium, Overall Range = Low

- Each layer is individually weighted and “sandwiched” with the others to equal 100%
A. NATURAL AND WORKING AGRICULTURAL LANDS PROCESS OVERVIEW

Goal: Identify lands with high natural quality and community value to maintain and preserve sensitive and resource rich lands important to Elbert County and the surrounding region.

1. A database of criteria important to wildlife habitat, land characteristics and working agricultural lands was built using Geographic Information (GIS) data from various sources. Each input criteria was ranked from high to low based on relative importance. Identification and ranking of suitable criteria for natural and working agricultural lands in Elbert County involved discussions with local planning officials, state wildlife specialists and conservation organizations.

2. These criteria were overlaid to create composite maps. Those areas containing more favorable conditions for wildlife habitat, land characteristics and working agricultural lands resulted in higher values.

3. The analysis maps were combined to create a composite map to identify lands with the greatest criteria for natural and working agricultural lands (page 27). This analysis was combined with the composite maps from B. Scenic Quality and C. Character of Parcel to identify the overall open space suitability within Elbert County.
A. NATURAL AND WORKING AGRICULTURAL LANDS COMPOSITE MAP

- Elbert County
- Local Road
- Highway
- Interstate
- Rail Road
- Lakes
- Streams

Natural and Working Lands

Significance
- High
- Low

Data Sources: Elbert County, Colorado, Aerial Data, 2009 Map

Disclaimer: This map and its contents are not to be used for legal or financial decisions. The County makes no representation or warranty as to the accuracy of any information contained herein.

DOUGLAS LAND CONSERVANCY

DESIGN WORKSHOP
B. SCENIC QUALITY PROCESS OVERVIEW

Goal: Identify lands where open space would preserve scenic lands or views important to the identity of Elbert County and the surrounding region.

1. A database of criteria important to scenic resources and views was built using Geographic Information System (GIS) data from various sources. Each input criteria was ranked from high to low based on relative importance. Identification and ranking of suitable criteria for scenic resources in Elbert County involved discussions with local planning officials, state wildlife specialists and conservation organizations.

2. These criteria were overlaid to create composite maps and build an understanding of areas containing more favorable conditions for scenic resources and views resulted in higher values.

3. The analysis maps were combined to create a composite map to identify lands with the highest scenic quality (page 35). This analysis was combined with the composite maps from A. Natural and Working Agricultural Lands and C. Character of Parcel to identify the overall open space suitability within Elbert County.

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**Criteria**

**B2. SCENIC RESOURCES**

**Cultural and Historic**
- Ranches
- Community Separators
- Recreation Areas
- Ghost Towns

**Natural**
- Elevations Greater Than 7,000 ft.
- Ponderosa Stands
- Scenic River Corridors
- Elevations Between 6,000 to 7,000 ft.
- Elevations Between 5,000 to 6,000 ft.

**Influence**

- Natural: 50%
- Cultural and Historic: 50%

**Criteria**

**B1. VIEWS**

- Frequency seen from major roads in Elbert County
- Frequency seen from major roads adjacent to Elbert County

**Influence**

- Frequency from major roads in Elbert County: 70%
- Frequency from major roads adjacent to Elbert County: 30%

**Influence**

See Page 36

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B. SCENIC QUALITY COMPOSITE MAP

- Elbert County
- Local Road
- Highway
- Interstate
- Rail Road
- Lakes
- Streams

Scenic Quality Significance

High

Low

1 in = 5 miles

Date: 6/19/2018

DOUGLAS LAND CONSERVANCY

DESIGN WORKSHOP
C. CHARACTER OF PARCEL PROCESS OVERVIEW

Goal: Identify sizable parcels of land in close proximity to conserved lands, recreation opportunities, neighborhoods and schools to preserve contiguous landscapes and promote accessibility for Elbert County residents.

1. A database of criteria important to parcel adjacency and size was built using Geographic Information (GIS) data from various sources. Each input criteria was ranked from high to low based on relative importance. Identification and ranking of suitable criteria for the character of parcels in Elbert County involved discussions with local planning officials, state wildlife specialists and conservation organizations.

2. These criteria were overlaid to create composite maps and build an understanding of areas containing more favorable conditions for adjacency and size resulting in higher values.

3. The analysis maps were combined to create a composite map to identify lands with the most character of parcel criteria (page 48). This analysis was combined with the composite maps from A. Natural and Working Agricultural Lands and B. Scenic Resources to identify the overall open space suitability within Elbert County.

CRITERIA

C2. PARCEL ADJACENCY
PROXIMITY
Parcel Proximity to Parks and Conserved Lands
Parcel Proximity to Recreation Opportunities
Parcel Proximity to Community Development

C1. PARCEL SIZE
PARCEL SIZE
Greater Than 1,000 Acres
Between 500 to 1,000 Acres
Between 100 to 500 Acres
Between 50 to 100 Acres
Between 20 to 50 Acres
Less Than 20 Acres

INFLUENCE

100%
LAYER UPON LAYER | open space suitability composite

Analysis of Landscape Character

A. Natural and Working Agricultural Lands
Goal: Identify lands with high natural quality and agricultural value to maintain and preserve sensitive and resource areas.

B. Scenic Quality
Goal: Identify lands that are highly visible and where open space would preserve scenic areas or views to surrounding features.

C. Character of Parcel
Goal: Identify suitable parcels of land in close proximity to existing conserved lands, recreation opportunities, neighborhoods or schools to preserve large contiguous landscapes.

Future Open Space Considerations
Goal: Identify growth and development pressures that have the potential to change existing land uses and impact future open space conservation.

Open Space Suitability

- Areas with high natural value, scenic quality, and are critical to retaining the character of Elbert County and the surrounding region.
- Areas with moderate natural value, scenic quality, and some importance to retaining the character of Elbert County.
- Areas with low natural value, scenic quality, and/or are facing significant growth and development pressures making open space conservation a lesser priority.
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

• Categories of conservation priorities were evaluated and assigned to each area of high value (not exclusive of each other)

• Various suggested approaches to achieve the priorities are recommended
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

NW ELBERT COUNTY

The western portion of Elbert County is experiencing significant exurban growth pressures from the Denver Metro area. Large lot subdivisions and residential development is typical in this area, which lies less than 30 minutes from Parker and Castle Rock. Prioritizing recreation access and scenic resource protection in this area will enhance quality of life. Accessible open space and trails will encourage an active, outdoor lifestyle and protection of views to the Front Range and community separators will retain the unique character.

PRIORITIES

- Cluster development and require new subdivisions set aside land for publicly accessible open spaces.
- Develop recreation greenways along travel routes and riparian corridors.
- Develop community connector trails and equestrian paths.
- Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.
- Create community separators.
- Exclude development a minimum of 100’ from stream edges.
Residential development in the western portion of Elbert County will likely spark community and economic growth in the towns of Elizabeth and Kiowa. Open space conservation priorities in this area should promote recreation through trails along SH 86, Elbert Road and connective greenways. Two Boy Scout Camps currently operate in the scenic Peaceful Valley and a popular 50-mile bike ride loops through this area. Conservation of scenic resources will greatly enhance these recreation experiences.

- Require new community development set aside land for publicly accessible open spaces.
- Construct trails in conjunction with highway and road improvements.
- Develop recreation greenways along travel routes, riparian corridors and forested areas.
- Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.
- Create community separators.
- Cluster development to preserve working agricultural lands adjacent to residential development.
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

Ridges and Forests

- Rocky ridges and tall ponderosa forests frame views of Pikes Peak and the Front Range in the southwestern corner of the County. Subdivision of lots has not begun in earnest as in areas to the north, but residential development is quickly occurring just across the El Paso County line. Conservation priorities in this area should focus on protection of ridgeline views and the scenic forests and grass understories, which also support a diversity of wildlife species.

Priorities

- Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.
- Cluster development to preserve open spaces adjacent to residential development.
- Preserve agricultural views through community separators.
- Preserve forests and vegetation of the High Plains through livestock regulations that benefit wildlife.
- Exclude development a minimum of 100’ from stream edges.
- Develop recreation greenways within undeveloped ridgeline corridors.
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

RIPARIAN CORRIDORS

Multiple north flowing creek corridors cut across the plains of Elbert County. These intermittent and perennial waterways support critical riparian habitat, winter range for a diversity of species and wildlife migration corridors. Protection of wildlife habitat along these stream corridors is the priority in this area. Stream protection provided through development buffers not only benefits wildlife, but also protects the integrity of water quality and reduces risks from flooding.

PRIORITIES

- Promote riparian area health and exclude development a minimum 100’ from stream edges.
- Exclude development on slopes greater than 15% adjacent to streams to minimize erosion.
- Regulate grazing and agriculture to benefit healthy ecosystems.
- Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.
- Cluster development to preserve natural areas adjacent to residential development.
- Limit subdivision of land to larger parcels to support contiguous working agricultural lands and wildlife habitat.

APPROACHES FOR CONSERVATION
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

### Ridgetops

Ridges followed by low valleys characterize Elbert County and mark the transition from the High Plains to the Rocky Mountains. Ridge Road offers panoramic views of Pikes Peak to the south, Mt. Evans to the west, Longs Peak to the north and unbroken plains to the east. Conservation priorities in this area should protect these views. Future community development in this area should be carefully sited to avoid disrupting scenic views. Open space and trails should be used to connect neighborhoods and potentially attract outside visitors.

### Priorities

- Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.
- Cluster development to preserve open spaces adjacent to residential development.
- Preserve agricultural views through community separators.

### Approaches for Conservation

- Require new community development set aside land for publicly accessible open spaces.
- Develop community hiking and equestrian trails.
- Cluster development to preserve working agricultural lands adjacent to residential development.
PRIORITIES AND APPROACHES

**WORKING AGRICULTURAL LANDS**

Agriculture and grazing are the backbone of the local economy. Protection of lands critical to the continued success of livestock operations and agricultural production is important to the economy and identity of Elbert County and its communities. Conservation priorities in these areas should support working agricultural lands. Designating agricultural areas and limiting residential development and the fragmentation of lands will be key to protecting viable working agricultural lands.

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<tr>
<th>PRIORITIES</th>
<th>APPROACHES FOR CONSERVATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect areas important to agriculture and grazing through zoning.</td>
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<td>Prevent fragmentation of working agricultural lands through subdivision ordinances that limit small parcels.</td>
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<td>Consider utilizing conservation easements and other mechanisms that support continued agricultural and ranching uses but limit physical development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restrict development on ridgetops and highly visible areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cluster development to preserve working agricultural lands adjacent to residential development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use best management practices that protect stream edges for agricultural and grazing impacts.</td>
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Thank You! Questions?