



Jefferson County Comprehensive Master Plan



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Introduction

This Area Plan is an update to the 1994 Central Mountains Community Plan. The creation of the Central Mountains Community Plan started in June of 1989, and involved rigorous participation from a Community Advisory Group comprised of 13 people, chosen by the Board of County Commissioners as representatives of the community. The update of this Plan was started by Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Staff in the spring of 2012 with the intent of incorporating the Community Plan into the Comprehensive Master Plan. Seven public meetings were held throughout the update process to gather comments on the Plan. The goal of the update was to re-evaluate the existing conditions related to land use and then create a land use recommendation map and policies that are specific to the Central Mountains area.

The recommendations in this Central Mountains Area Plan supersede the recommendations in the Central Mountains Community Plan. This Plan is shorter than the 1994 plan because any goals or policies that were duplicated in the Comprehensive Master Plan have been removed. This Plan now only contains information, land use recommendations, and policies specific to the Central Mountains Area.

History

The history of the Central Mountain community with its three canyons Mt. Vernon, Bear Creek and Clear Creek is rich with memories of Colorado's early mining days. That these canyons are the "Gateways to the Rockies" is a statement just as true today as it was in 1859 when miners began hauling their equipment up the old Ute Indian trails to the gold mining near Idaho Springs, Central City, Leadville and Breckenridge.

So it was that when Dr. Joseph Casto, an Ohio minister who arrived in Colorado in 1859, saw the possibility for making his fortune not by mining (which he tried), but by building a road up what would later be called Mt. Vernon Canyon. Dr. Casto received that year a charter to build the Denver Auraria and Colorado Wagon Road, a crude road that started in nearby Denver, going west into his newly platted town of Mt. Vernon, and continuing on up the canyon to Bergen's Ranch (at Bergen Park), then going south to present day Conifer and on to the South Park area.

At this same time period in Jefferson County's history, a number of other wagon or toll roads were being built through the canyons, including Mr. W. A. H. Loveland's wagon road up Clear Creek Canyon to the "Gilpin Diggin's". This latter road, however, was so narrow and rough that it was soon abandoned. It later became the road bed for the narrow gauge railroad that connected the Central City and Idaho Springs mines with the major railways around Denver. So, although Dr. Casto's toll road, which followed the creek up the canyon, was the main artery, it was soon to be joined, crossed and even used by other historic wagon roads going to the gold mines. Old maps and records show companies such as the Denver City, Mt. Vernon and Gregory Toll Road, the Georgetown Stage Road, the Apex-Gregory Wagon Road, the Genesee Wagon Road, Leadville Free Road, the Chimney Gulch Road, St. Vrain, Golden City and Colorado Wagon Road, and the Morrison to Evergreen Toll Road, all connecting at some point with the Mt. Vernon Toll Road.

The little town of Mt. Vernon was also conceived and promoted by Dr. Casto and, in 1859, the Rocky Mountain News contained an article describing the new village, its strategic location and announcing that lots were free for the asking! Nestled between the foothills and the hogback at the entrance to the canyon, it appeared to be the perfect site for a thriving city. Governor Robert Steele, the first Governor of the Territory of Jefferson, Colorado's first provisional government, built a house there before his family came west from Ohio. The George Morrison family built a sturdy rock building as a toll station and hotel. An early plat map shows the town designed in a rectangular grid of approximately 3,600 very small lots! During the time it existed as a viable place to live, Mt. Vernon had a school, church, Morrison's stage and hotel building, and numerous homes.

But even the strategic location at the foot of the canyon couldn't help the town's decline. A decrease in mining operations as the Civil War took away the miners, competition from the Clear Creek railroad Mr. Loveland and associates completed in 1872, other tollroads, and the growing city of Golden were all events that prevented Dr. Casto's dream from being fulfilled. Perhaps the first realization that he might have difficulties came as early as 1860 when Governor Steele's home burned and the family moved to Apex, a small community several miles to the north. There, Governor Steele built another home and, with business associates, constructed the Apex-Gregory Toll Road. Hikers going on the Apex Trail today can still see traces of the old cribbing for this road, which for the short time it was in use, went up Apex Gulch (near Heritage Square), along the crest of Lookout Mountain, and down the canyon to join Dr. Casto's toll road.

By 1870, Mt. Vernon was mostly abandoned, although the post office and stage coach station continued to be operated for some years by William Matthews. Through the years, Mr. and Mrs. Matthews expanded the Morrison's building, making it a comfortable home for their family, and today the old rock house is still standing, tucked down in the canyon in I-70's permanent shadow. Near the Matthews house on a grassy plot, stands a small historical marker noting Governor Steele's original home site. And the old Mt. Vernon road, if one knows where to look, can be seen in small sections down along the creek or meandering through the pine trees all the way to Floyd Hill. Only one section remains used and intact today in the Mt. Vernon Canyon, and that is Rockland Road.

The ensuing years brought changes to the canyons as ranchers and farmers settled the land. They supplied the mining towns with their products of potatoes, oats, and beef. There was some mining along the hogback, in Idledale, and even some on Lookout Mountain and around Genesee. And, because there were numerous sawmills in the area, most of the trees on the hills and mountainsides had been cut down, a sight difficult to imagine today!

As the early settlers homesteaded the Central Mountain area, schools and churches were needed, and by 1873, a one room frame school house was built in the canyon beside the old road approximately where the present day buffalo enclosures are located. Church services were held there because it was too far to attend the one in Mt. Vernon town. By 1879, however, the Rockland Church, then called the Mt. Zion Church of the Rocky Mountain Mission, was built on the Mt. Vernon Road. During the years the church was being used, it was not only the center for religious services, but the place for all of the community and social gatherings. Today that church still stands along the old road, now Rockland Road, near the cemetery where a number of the early settlers were buried.

It is difficult to imagine how these canyons and mountainsides must have looked in the 1800s (before I-70 and U.S. 40 and all the present day homesites) with just the old dirt Mt. Vernon Road winding along the bottom of the canyon beside the everflooding creek. Going into Denver for supplies with a horse and wagon meant an overnight stay in Golden, getting into the city the next day with another

overnight stay at a hotel before heading back...a four day trip! By 1880, the old Mt. Vernon road crisscrossed over twenty small bridges. The road flooded with every rain and made traveling very difficult. So, in response to pressure from the ranchers, in 1880 Jefferson County bought the old toll road for \$700 and declared it a public highway.

No history of the canyons would be complete without mention of some of the early families, such as the Frank and Abraham Hartzells, who in 1874, homesteaded in the valley just below Paradise Hills; the John Colloms built a home on 80 acres (near the entrance to Riva Chase); the H. W. Chiles and A. L. Hess families. Other early settlers include the members of the Thiede family, who in the 1870s first settled along a stream in the valley between the Rilliet Cattle Company ranch and Cody Park, but later bought land up Shingle Creek.

The Brauns have been ranching in the Grapevine/Idledale valley since 1908, and the Craig family homesteaded the land where the Girl Scout Camp is now located on Genesee Mountain. Near Mt. Vernon Country Club, the Samuel Warrens settled on land that extended from near the buffalo enclosure down toward Clear Creek. Today, traces of their first home can be seen near the Beaver Brook Trail.

Of all the early settlers, two remain as the most colorful, John Patrick and Mrs. Louise C. Gifford. Mr. Patrick and family came to this valley in 1860, acquired 800 acres, and received a charter for the Genesee Toll Road, a route for travelers going up Mt. Vernon Canyon and on to the gold mines near Idaho Springs and Central City. The family home and station is used today as the caretaker's house near Denver's elk preserve just west of Genesee Park. Back then, the Patricks were in the local news numerous times because of family murders and court disputes. But the most infamous local resident was Mrs. Gifford, who for nearly twenty years, ran a horse rustling operation from her ranch, until she was sent to jail. So the story goes, the Giffords bought the New York Ranch, a stage coach stop on the old Mt. Vernon Toll Road in the late 1860s. The ranch house and extensive buildings were, at that time, in the valley between Paradise Hills and Sawmill Gulch. It was at the New York Ranch that the Chimney Gulch and Apex roads, which had already joined together on the crest of Lookout Mountain (on what is now Lookout Mountain Road), met the canyon toll road. Georgina Brown, in her book "The Shining Mountains", relates that at this point also, the Leadville Free Road began, making a gentle climb up the southeast side of Genesee Mountain, going around the back side and over to Cold Spring Gulch and on to Bergen Park. Parts of these old roadbeds can still be seen today. This latter road, also called the New York Road, does not however appear on any of the older reference maps available.

Captain and Mrs. Lucian Ralston arrived in 1879, coming from Kentucky where Captain Ralston had been a teacher at Centre College in Danville. After first settling in Cody Park to raise potatoes, the Ralston family moved to the western slope, then to land just south of the Patrick place. Eventually, Captain Ralston bought a ranch in Mt. Vernon Canyon beside the old road. There, in 1920, the Captain's son, Lucian M. built the Pioneer Store, a welcome stop for the travelers coming up the canyon road in their motor cars. In the back of the store was a community hall for social gatherings and Grange meetings. It can be said that this hall and the Ralston family were at the center of canyon social and civic life in those days. When U.S.40 was built, the Ralstons built another Pioneer Store up beside the new highway. Until recently, that building survived as a company selling log homes. Their old home and store below, however, were destroyed when I-70 was constructed.

The old Mt. Vernon Road, unpaved all its life, followed the creek up the canyon and endured the constant washing out as the spring rains flooded it. It became a free county road, then a state road

known as the Lincoln Highway; after World War I it was called the Victory Highway. In about 1926 it was numbered 40, a transcontinental highway between New York and California. Demands for a better road became apparent as automobiles were designed for faster speed, and in 1937, U.S. 40 was constructed higher up the canyon walls away from the flooding creek.

Sometime in the late 1800s, the Morrison to Evergreen Toll Road was built along Bear Creek with the toll station at the community of Morrison. While old road maps indicate this road, now Highway 74, was originally no more than a rough trail for many years, by 1911 it was improved and numbered Highway 27. The Denver Motor Club, formed in the early days of the automobile, had a popular restaurant and dance hall beside Bear Creek on Highway 27. These two canyon roads, primitive as they must have been, were fair weather challenges for those fortunate enough to own motor cars. Because the beautiful hills to the west of Denver became more accessible, by the early 1900s promoters saw the potential for building summer homes in and around the Central Mountains area. In 1906, Mr. John Starbuck purchased land along Bear Creek and north along Sawmill Gulch where he platted a community which he named after himself. Sometime around 1938, the townspeople changed the name to Idledale.

An Englishman, Rees C. Vidler, and his associates set up the Lookout Mountain Park Company to develop the top of Lookout Mountain. Mr. Vidler, however, was not the first developer to try to cash in on Lookout Mountain's potential. A few years previous, several local residents had tried and failed to promote homesites with views. To get the prospective buyers up to the park, Mr. Vidler built a funicular up the mountain in 1910, ending handily, very near his real estate office. Wonderful plans were made for hotels, parks, and lakes, and, though some summer homes and a dance hall were built, most of Mr. Vidler's dreams failed to come true. At that time, three roads led up to Lookout: Mt. Vernon Road, the old Apex Road, and Chimney Gulch Road (a steep and winding road built in 1872 that started in Golden). But even those and the Lariat Trail completed in 1913, could not help Mr. Vidler complete his scheme for a beautiful mountain resort.

Across the way on Mt. Morrison, John Brisbane Walker, owner of the Garden of the Titans (Red Rocks Park) and what is now Mt. Falcon, built a funicular up to the summit of Mt. Morrison in about 1908. Short lived as both funiculars were, they were very popular with people living in the city below who came up to picnic and to enjoy the views.

The land around Cody Park contained some homesteads for small farms, some dating from the 1860s. In the 1920s, the area was platted into small lots for summer residents. Many of those homes have been renovated and are lived in today. The area now known as Mt. Vernon Country Club Estates was also developed in 1922 as a country club, golf course and summer home sites for Denverites willing to make the trip up the old canyon road. During the depression, the club house was seldom used; it actually closed during World War II. By 1948, however, the new U.S. 40 and increased prosperity caused an interest in mountain properties, and gradually families began winterizing the summer cottages for year-round living. The club house was renovated and reopened about that time, and some years later, the addition and swimming pool were added. Homeowners living on the back side of the club area are able to enjoy the beautiful Clear Creek Canyon to the north. Within this canyon, the Beaver Brook Trail, laid out in 1919 by the Colorado Mountain Club, wanders for seven miles through a spectacular variety of scenery: deep valleys, woodlands, a water fall, and through high meadows overlooking Clear Creek. Near the trail is an old Indian cave in which artifacts were found. Clear Creek Canyon is unique in that it has escaped development.

It took the City of Denver to open up the mountains when, in 1912, it began the appropriation of land in the Mt. Vernon Canyon and Evergreen areas for their Denver Mountain Parks. By 1913, Lariat Trail Road was completed from Golden, up Mt. Zion, across Windy Saddle and over to the new Lookout Mountain Park, later expanded to include the grave site of William F. Cody ("Buffalo Bill"). This road was part of a grand park system for Denver, with early designs by the famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Originally, the Lariat Trail was to connect all the parks within the system, including the ones in Evergreen and Echo Lake, with both ends leading into Denver as beautiful tree-lined boulevards.

Within the Central Mountain area, Colorow Point, Genesee Park, Red Rocks Park, the Katherine Craig Park, Little Park, and Lookout Mountain Park (Buffalo Bill's Grave) were all purchased for the Denver Mountain Park system. Today, all of these parks, including the Lariat Trail and the Bear Creek Scenic Drive, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Denver Mountain Parks, Jefferson County's Open Space parks, and the land under the protection of the Clear Creek Land Conservancy make living in this Central Mountain community a unique privilege.

In 1915, the Charles Boettcher family bought acreage on Lookout Mountain for their rustic style summer mansion, Lorraine Lodge. Situated on Colorow Peak in the days before the communication towers, this summer home had a beautiful view of the city and plains below. Given to the County in 1968, the Boettcher Mansion today is part of the Lookout Mountain Nature Center and Preserve. When Buffalo Bill was buried on Lookout Mountain in 1917, over 20,000 people climbed the mountain or drove up Lariat Trail to attend the services. This arrangement to locate the grave there had been worked out with the family and the Denver mayor. Cody, Wyoming, Buffalo Bill's Wyoming home, was never pleased with the arrangement, and in 1948, the Cody American Legion offered \$10,000 for the return of the body. As the casket was encased in concrete, that would have been a difficult job! Nothing came of this real or imagined threat, and today the grave site continues to be one of the most visited tourist sites in Colorado.

Another unique place above the canyon walls is the property owned by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who, in 1915, selected the site as a summer camp for girls from their Denver orphanage. Although no longer used for that purpose, the Mother Cabrini shrine, so named after Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, serves as a spiritual experience to the many tourists who wind their way up the road to the top, and for those who climb the 373 steps that lead to a 22 foot statue of Jesus Christ.

In 1917, the Genesee Ski Club was organized by a group of Denverites who then cleared away trees on the north side of Genesee Mountain for a ski run and jump. The University of Denver also used the jump until the early 1950's, although the lack of snow was always a problem. While there may have been a lack of snow, there was never a lack of skiers and onlookers, as shown by early 1920s photographs of traffic jams in the bottom of the valley. In spite of the not-so-good roads, people were determined to come to the mountains.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, it was difficult for the farmers and ranchers to make a living in the canyons and to also drive out of the canyon to work elsewhere. Norm Ralston who has lived in this area all his life recalls that a trip into Denver and back in a Model T took up most of the day! Time consuming, but shorter than the four day trip by horse and wagon! One local industry was successful, however: fur farming. In fact, this area became one of the few places in the country where fox pelts could be obtained. Members of the Ralston family had fox farms on their properties, and there was a very successful ranch where the Genesee Town Centre now stands, as well as one in the Mount Vernon Club area near the "red barn", and one at the present day Arapahoe East ski area. As fox went

out of fashion, mink and later chinchilla were raised. Competition from the foreign markets and development of inexpensive synthetic furs finally put an end to the industry.

Not only was the narrow gauge railroad in Clear Creek Canyon a quick way west, it served in the 1800s and early 1900s as one of the two ways to and from the very popular Beaver Brook dance pavilion built on the hillside above Clear Creek. The old railroad operated until 1941 when it was abandoned and the rails taken up. A few years later, after World War II, construction began on Highway 6 from Golden through the canyon. This two-lane road follows the creek along the canyon bed and is traveled and enjoyed by thousands of tourists and residents. The rugged beauty of this canyon makes it a unique asset in the Central and North Mountains communities.

The change from mountain rural to mountain suburbs came gradually during the 1950s as several developers bought land on Lookout Mountain, negotiated water rights with Golden and subdivided the land. Now the timing seemed to be right for growth throughout the Central Mountains Area. In the mid-1950s, a huge amusement complex was planned in the area that used to be the old town of Apex, near the mouth of the gulch. Although Heritage Square is there now, originally the place was to be the "Magic Mountain", a grand, Disney-like park. Because it was known that Native American remains had been found there, in 1959 a team of archaeologists from Harvard University excavated to remove the artifacts before construction of the original amusement park. This area had been known locally as far back as 1925 when a Native American burial site (Woodland period 1,000 A.D.) had been exposed and looted. Excavations by the Harvard archaeologists revealed that early man had lived in that area since long before 3,500 B.C., and that subsequent Native Americans had lived there off and on until the arrival of the white man.

The canyon roads were now becoming the way to the new ski resorts, Denver was spreading westward, making it easier for people to live in the mountains and work in the city. U.S. 40 was still the only road and it could become crowded and backed up on weekends as people from the city came to the mountains to ski, and to picnic and hike in the Denver Mountain Parks. Plans were made for constructing the new I-70 ... a highway that would change the contour of the valley and almost completely bury the old Mt. Vernon Road along the creek bed.

Communication towers began appearing on Lookout Mountain before the County had any regulations in place to control their spread. Mr. Vidler's old real estate office was converted into an Indian Trading Post and restaurant where Sioux and Santa Clara Indians sold their handicrafts. It was a popular stop for the hundreds of people visiting Buffalo Bill's grave site nearby.

By 1954, there had been an elementary school in the canyon for more than 80 years; first the one room school house which stood near the old Mt. Vernon Road from 1873 until 1939, and then the brick building at U.S. 40 and Lookout Mountain Road which now serves as the Genesee Grange. Because more families were moving to the foothills, the Ralston elementary school was built at its present site near the Mt. Vernon Country Club property. By 1960, the old church beside the Mt. Vernon (now Rockland) road, was closed down and a new Rockland Memorial Community church was built at its present location. Today the original 1879 church, an historic landmark, and its adjoining cemetery are lovingly cared for by members of the newer congregation.

In the early 1970s, Jefferson County Open Space began acquiring open space lands. Jefferson County Open Space has often been referred as the nation's first tax-funded County open space program. It has humble beginnings dating back to 1972 with two pivotal organizations: PLAN Jeffco and the Jefferson County League of Women Voters. These organizations proposed a unique concept to the

Board of County Commissioners to preserve the scenic vistas and open lands within the County through the collection of ½ of 1% sales tax on retail sales in Jefferson County to fund the program.

The Enabling Resolution requires these funds to be used, “exclusively for the planning for, developing necessary access to, acquisition, maintenance and preservation of open space real property for the use and benefit of the public.” In 1980 this Resolution was amended to allow for the expenditure of these funds for construction, acquisition, and maintenance of park and recreation capital improvements. When Jefferson County voters approved the Jeffco Open Space sales tax, the Enabling Resolution did not establish a “sunset” or end date to ensure ongoing land conservation, stewardship of open space and parklands, and access for public enjoyment.

To date, there is approximately 11,000 acres of County owned and managed open space and close to 45 miles of trail in and around the Central Mountains Area. The Jefferson County Open Space parks within the Central Mountain community are: Windy Saddle Park, Apex Park, Clear Creek Canyon Park, the Lookout Mountain Nature Preserve, including the Lookout Mountain Nature Center and historic Boettcher Mansion, Lair ‘o the Bear Park, Mount Falcon Park, and Matthews-Winters Park, which includes part of the old Mt. Vernon town. The Matthews-Winters Park is situated on the south side of I-70 at the entrance to Mt. Vernon Canyon and designates the beginning of the scenic corridor.

A section of Matthews-Winters Park south of I-70 is the site of the famous Dinosaur Ridge found in 1877 by Arthur Lakes, a School of Mines professor. The bones he and an associate found that year came from the late Jurassic period of about 150 million years ago when this area was a swampy lowland. Professor Lakes shipped his complete discovery, tons of bones, off to Yale Peabody Museum where they received nationwide recognition. Recently, some of the bones were returned to the museum in Morrison so that facsimiles could be made for display. The nonprofit Friends of Dinosaur Ridge has established a natural history trail system along the hogback, and has installed informative signs for self-guided tours along the ridge.

Clear Creek Land Conservancy (CCLC) was formed in 1986 as a non-profit community-supported organization to assist landowners and public agencies in protecting the mountain portion of the Clear Creek Basin. Through land acquisitions, conservation easements, and education, CCLC helps to preserve public open space, scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, trails, and provides educational opportunities as well as encourages development compatible with these resources. To date, prime properties on the Beaver Brook Trail and in the Clear Creek Gorge have been preserved through CCLC’s work.

In the Central Mountains Plan area, Genesee was the first “planned” community. Its 2,000 acres was originally comprised of 50 different parcels of land; some ranches of 500 acres, some very small plots. The developers spent 10 years putting the package together, starting in 1964, with construction beginning in 1974-75. It was their idea that it was better to have an overall land use plan for the entire area, planning from the beginning the density, open space, and appropriateness of the individual site.

In preparation for I-70, in the early 1970s a large cut was made through the hogback and sections of the canyon walls were blasted to make room for the freeway lanes. Now one can see that the hogback consists of sedimentary rock laid down in shallow seas and lakes 100 to 160 million years ago. It was the uplift of the front range which occurred over a period of some 20 million years that gave these formations their tilt. The more westerly strata is the Morrison formation, famous for its dinosaur remains, while the easterly rock which forms the crest of the hogback is the Dakota group of sandstones and coaly beds. Today, paths along the highway cut are available to view the geology, and the strata are identified with signs. Just to the west, the red sandstones of the Fountain Formation and

the Lyons sandstone are exposed in Red Rocks park. Further up the canyons, the current rounded hills such as Lookout Mountain and Genesee are the eroded remains of the igneous and metamorphic deposits made when the front range uplifted.

As the new highway was being constructed, officials held a design competition for the Genesee Park bridge to be built at exit 254. The winning design is a bridge that perfectly frames the first panoramic view of the continental divide for the westbound motorists. Also, at this time, U.S. 40 was recontoured in places so that it would follow the new interstate below, and be an access road. With the construction of I-70, the little Mount Vernon Creek and the old road at the bottom of the canyon were mostly covered over. Several homes were removed, and the contour of the valley was changed drastically. Would the early miners and settlers even recognize the canyon now?

One could almost divide the Central Mountains area into three broad time periods: the early years when miners traveled the wagon roads on their way to gold and silver mines and the land was being homesteaded; the opening up of mountain lands for recreation and summer living because of the automobile and acquisition of the Denver Mountain parks; and as Jefferson County grew, and traveling became easier, the change from rural mountain living to the present day mountain suburban lifestyle. Perhaps the change could best be illustrated by remembering that it used to take a family four days to get into Denver for supplies...and now it is a quick 20 minute trip.

This Central Mountains Community Plan looks to the future of the three canyons: Clear Creek, Mt. Vernon and Bear Creek. The goals, policies, and solutions in the Plan address the need for a careful balance between growth and preservation of the natural characteristics of the mountain environment and the quality of life for all residents.

Following are documents and people who have been most helpful in supplying information and sharing memories about the Central Mountains:

- Georgina Brown, author of "The Shining Mountain"
- Norman Ralston, history
- Stanley Thiede, history and photographs
- Glenn R. Scott, maps
- Francis Rizzari, history and photographs
- Hazel Humphrey, history
- Bruce H. Bryant, geology
- "Crufutt's Grip-Sack Guide of Colorado", 1885
- "Excavations at Magic Mountain" by Cynthia Irwin-Williams and Henry J. Williams
- Information was also received from the Jefferson County Historical Society, the Colorado Historical Museum and the Denver Public Library
- Dorothy Reed, History Coordinator

Demographics

Demographics for the Area Plans are updated when an individual Area Plan is updated. Demographic information, such as trends in economic data, population forecasting and aging, influences the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Master Plan. Data is gathered primarily from the US Census, Colorado State Demographer, Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), Jefferson County R-1 School District and the Jefferson Economic Development Corporation (Jeffco EDC). The most current demographics can be found on the Jefferson County Demographics website. Plan Area Boundaries do not always correspond with census tract data, therefore, staff derives information from the best data available.

Land Use Recommendations

Geology, and human history since 1859 have combined to place the Central Mountains area as the first impression of the Colorado Rockies to millions of Colorado visitors.

Most tourists, as well as most residents of the state, encounter the Colorado Rockies in Jefferson County, between the upslope approaches to the Hogback and the western boundary of the County. Planning for the mountainous portions of the County must be approached with the desire to enhance what nature has provided, if possible; if not, at least avoid harming an irreplaceable asset.

Specific land use recommendations are shown on the Land Use Map at the end of this plan. Some areas have additional policies that apply. Those policies are listed below.

Open Space

Land already acquired with Jefferson County Open Space funds, land identified as park land and held by a Homeowner's Association or other similar organization and land owned by local, state, or federal government for use by the public as park lands should be preserved, and increased, where possible. Proposals to rezone open space should be evaluated against the criteria for rezoning open space in the Zoning Resolution and the recommendations in the Comprehensive Master Plan.

Residential Uses

The history of residential development in the Central Mountains helps explain both the diversity of housing types available and the patterns of growth in the different neighborhoods.

Before Interstate 70 was built and before the area's local roads were paved, Denverites flocked to Lookout Mountain, Idledale and Genesee Mountain to escape the summer heat and the city. Vacation retreats were established, often a cabin on a small parcel of land, with an outhouse in the woods. Portions of these areas were subdivided into very small lots that did not always consider well and septic separation; practical, safe access; environmental protection; or the preservation of views from adjacent lands.

As roads and cars improved, commuting to Denver became feasible, and people began to winterize existing homes or build new ones. Suddenly those areas sought for their remoteness were now desirable for their accessibility.

Today, the appeal of "close in" mountain living, the major amount of open space and parks, and the mountain and city views all contribute to making the Central Mountains Area a highly desirable place to live.

The dilemma facing this area involves these major issues:

- How can the desirable aspects of “mountain living” (e.g., privacy, clean air and water, natural settings), be protected while acknowledging current development pressures and property rights established many years ago?
- What can be done to mitigate the undesirable aspects that arise when these (old time) land use rights designed for weekend and summer use (e.g., small lots, well and septic inadequacies, sub-standard roads) are converted to year-round, constant use?
- What can be done about the use of these small lots as they become more desirable for new development in the Central Mountains Area?

Policies

1. Ensure that future residential development respects the unique mountain ecosystem and natural environment, and enhances the quality of life, particularly the “open” nature enjoyed by the residents, in the Central Mountains.
2. Development should make maximum use of the site’s existing vegetation to screen development. The appropriate recommendations in the Visual Resources section and the Mountain Site Design Criteria should be followed.
3. When resource areas (i.e., wildlife range, visual resources, historical sites, etc.) overlap on a site, the resource evaluation should balance the competing values of these resources to achieve the intent of this Plan.
4. Much of the existing zoning does not conform to these policies. To achieve long range solutions to inappropriate land uses that have not been built out, all existing plats and zonings that do not meet these policies should be brought into compliance with the policies using methods such as downzoning, open space acquisition, density transfers, conservation easements, tax incentives, etc.
5. To avoid the negative visual impact of hillside cuts and high profile construction, new development should meet or exceed the minimum criteria established in the Mountain Site Design Criteria.
6. Provide for housing opportunities consistent with the unique resources and constraints of the Central Mountains area. Density recommendations are based on slope, wildfire hazard, wildlife habitat, compatibility and water availability.
7. Use the natural terrain to create a high level of privacy for existing and future residents.
8. New residential development should complement the character of the community, comply with the recommendations in other sections of this Plan, and comply with the applicable criteria in the Mountain Site Design Criteria section.
9. No transfer of density should be allowed from areas inside the Geologic Hazard Overlay Zone District.
10. In Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and County designated floodplain hazard areas, no credit for the transfer of density should be given. Development within the floodplain should only be allowed when the development is meeting the Floodplain Development Regulations.
Note: Policies 9 and 10 are based on the premise that the Geologic Hazard Overlay Zone and the Floodplain Overlay Zone District maps adopted by the County currently restrict development and therefore it is not reasonable to give a development transfer credit.
11. Housing densities shown in this Plan should not be construed as guarantees of the number of residential units which may be built upon a site. The actual number of units is determined by applying the recommendations in this Plan and by the degree of compliance with policies in this plan.

Specific Land Use Recommendations

Reference the Land Use Map at the end of this Plan for the specific land use recommendations for each parcel.

The recommendations in this section are intended to accommodate future housing needs in a way that is compatible with the unique resources of the Central Mountains area. When development is proposed, the characteristics of the site are identified and development impacts are evaluated. It is during the development review process that wildlife habitat and visually sensitive areas are identified, the capacity of the roads to carry additional traffic is determined, the water and sanitation service is verified, and the availability of essential services identified.

Area 1: Area of Stability

These areas have already been subdivided, in many cases under previous regulations that allowed for lot sizes smaller than what would currently be allowed. Any new development or redevelopment in these areas should be consistent with the character, scale, uses and typical lot sizes of the properties in the general vicinity of the proposed development. Community Uses in this area should be of a size, scale and design that is compatible with the uses in the general vicinity.

The following additional policies apply only to specific subareas of Use Area 1. For example, policy "A" below only applies to areas on the Land Use Map labeled "1A".

Area 1A: If these properties wish to further develop, they should seek annexation into the adjacent municipality.

Area 1B: Cody Park is a subdivision that was created before the County had regulations for the subdivision of land. As such, each parcel is typically a conglomeration of many tiny platted lots. In order to better provide for predictability of future land use, and to reduce the number of legal-non conforming structures, the owners of land in Cody Park should work together to rezone this area into a planned development that follows the existing development and ownership patterns. The Cody Park area should also be re-platted.

Cody Park is served by a cul-de-sac. An emergency access/egress route has been developed, but the route should be more clearly marked with reflective markings. The local community and the fire district should inform new residents of the location and use of the emergency access/egress route.

Due to the added dangers of structural fire turning into wildfires in this area, the community should work with local water providers and the Fire Protection District to extend dry hydrants into Cody Park.

Area 1C: The Mount Vernon Country Club is a subdivision that was created before the County had regulations for the subdivision of land. As such, each parcel is typically a conglomeration of many tiny platted lots. Also, the Mount Vernon Country Club is served by a Metropolitan District and Home Owner's Association that strictly controls development within their borders. In many cases, the uses allowed by the zoning are not allowed by the district/HOA. In order to better provide for predictability of future land use, and to reduce the number of legal-non conforming structures, this land should be rezoned to follow the Master Plan of the District and HOA. The area should also be re-platted.

Area 1D: These properties appear to be partially in the Town of Morrison. Future development of these properties should be done in coordination with Morrison, including the possibility of annexation.

Area 2: 1 dwelling unit (du) per 5 acres for development not served by public water. 1 du per acre for development served by public water.

The following additional policies apply only to specific subareas of Use Area 2. For example, policy “A” below only applies to areas on the Land Use Map labeled “2A”.

Area 2A: New development should preserve the meadow as much as practicable, by pushing the building sites to the edges of the meadow, and away from the highly visible portions of the site.

Area 3: 1 du per 10 acres.

The following additional policies apply only to specific subareas of Use Area 3. For example, policy “A” below only applies to areas on the Land Use Map labeled “3A”.

Area 3A: New Development should avoid steep slopes of over 30%, as well as those areas that are highly visible from I-70, as shown on the Viewshed Maps.

Area 3B: Careful placement of building sites is needed to minimize visual impacts to the I-70 viewshed.

Area 3C: If an emergency access/egress is constructed, then 1 du per 5 acres.

Area 3D: No change in zoning that increases the number of dwelling units that take access from Rainbow Hill Road should be allowed until an emergency access/egress can be developed, unless the Foothills Fire Protection District has no objection to the access for the proposed development.

Area 4: (Large lots in steep terrain)

These Use Areas consist of large lots of mostly undeveloped lands. The topography in these areas range from slightly sloping to extreme slopes of greater than 40%. As such, no single density is appropriate for the entire area. In order to determine the maximum number of residential units for new developments, the entire property to be developed should be analyzed for slope, and the number of units determined as follows:

For the portion of the site that is 40% slope or greater, 1 dwelling unit (du) per 20 acres. For slopes between 30% and 40%, 1 du per 15 acres. For slopes between 20% and 30%, 1 du per 10 acres. For slopes less than 20%, 1 du per 5 acres.

Percent Slope	Dwelling Unit Credit
40% and greater	1 du per 20 Acres
30% - 39.99%	1 du per 15 Acres
20% - 29.99%	1 du per 10 Acres
Less than 20%	1 du per 5 Acres

All dwelling units and improvements should be transferred from the steeper slopes to the areas of less than 30% slopes. The overall number of units should not exceed those derived from the table, however the lot sizes may be reduced to no less than 5 acres, to allow for clustering and sensitive siting of building sites. An example of a development on 100 acres follows.

Percent Slope	Acres at that slope	Number of Units Allowed
40% and greater	20 acres	1
30% - 39.99%	15 acres	1
20% - 29.99%	30 acres	3
Less than 20%	35 acres	7
TOTAL:	100 acres	12

The following additional policies apply only to specific subareas of Use Area 4. For example, policy “A” below only applies to areas on the Land Use Map labeled “4A”.

Area 4A: New Developments in this area should work with the Genesee Fire Protection District and the Genesee Foundation to provide an emergency egress from Genesee to Grapevine Road. A density bonus should be given if an emergency egress is granted.

Area 4B: New Development in the area should avoid those areas that are highly visible from I-70, as shown on the Viewshed Maps.

Area 4C: New Developments in this area should work with the Genesee Fire Protection District and the Genesee Foundation to provide fuel breaks for wildfire purposes. If such fuel breaks (including a Forest Management Plan to maintain the fuel break) can be achieved, a density bonus should be given. Also, dry hydrants should be extended into this area as development occurs to assist in structure fire and wildfire fighting purposes.

Area 4D: New Developments in this area should work with the Genesee Fire Protection District and the Genesee Foundation to provide fuel breaks for wildfire purposes.

Area 4E: This area is currently used as a Community Use (the Mother Cabrini Shrine), if this use changes, this area should follow the recommendations in Use Area 4B.

Area 4F: This area is currently zoned for, and used for telecommunications uses. If a change in use to non-telecommunications uses is proposed, the recommendations in Use Area 4 should be followed.

Area 5: 1 du per 35 acres. This area is in the Front Range Mountain Backdrop, and is not suitable for increased density.

Area 6: This area is owned by the Colorado School of Mines. The portion north of US Hwy 6 should remain Community Use. The portion south of US Hwy 6 should remain open, as it provides a link to Jefferson County Open Space, as well as being in the Front Range Mountain Backdrop. If this area develops, it should annex into the City of Golden.

Non-Residential Uses

The amount and location of retail stores, office buildings, restaurants, commercial services, and light industrial operations help determine the character of the community. Proper planning is necessary to maintain the balance of these uses with residential development and maintain the mountain rural community and its natural setting. The area provides some local employment opportunities, however the majority of the residents work in the metropolitan region. Access to goods and services in Golden and Evergreen reduces the demand for extensive commercial and light industrial activity in the area. Buildout of the existing commercial zoning will generally provide sufficient goods and services to serve the daily needs of the residents.

General Policies

1. Accommodate retail, office and service land uses which:
 - a. demonstrate compatibility with the surrounding land uses in terms of visual appearance, traffic generation, water and sewer requirements, noise and air quality impacts;
 - b. are scaled to support the convenience needs of local residents; and
 - c. provide limited employment opportunities.
2. Safety should be a primary concern when access drives to non-residential developments are developed.
3. The Activity Center's retail shops should serve the daily needs of residents and tourists.
4. Outside Commercial Centers, non-residential uses should follow the criteria in the "Other Potential Uses in Designated Residential Areas" in the Development Review Section, with the following additional conditions:

- a. Cottage Industry Heavy should not allow for fabrication or manufacturing.
- b. Destination Resorts should have a minimum lot size of 35 acres.
- c. New Event Centers should not be located within Areas of Stability (Use Area 1).
- d. Equestrian Centers should have a minimum lot size of 10 acres.

Community Uses

1. New community uses should be designed to complement the mountain environment in scale, building materials and architecture.

Genesee Activity Center

This Activity Center is fully zoned and platted. This activity center should remain focused on office uses, with a subordinate amount of retail and service uses. Any redevelopment in the center should require that potentially negative visual impacts are mitigated.

Isolated Existing Commercial Areas

The commercial centers are intended to minimize the pressure for strip development along the roads. By designating areas where commercial development should occur, sprawl of commercial development will be minimized. These centers should provide convenient access to goods and services needed by local residents and should be sited and designed to be compatible with the surrounding area.

These centers should offer benefits to residents by providing services within the area. This could lead to a reduction in miles driven and would contribute to better air quality in the mountains and the metropolitan region, and lower transportation costs. The centers are not intended to provide major employment opportunities or duplicate the diversity of goods and services found in the metropolitan commercial areas.

Area 7: Mountain Scale Neighborhood Commercial uses, excluding gas stations.

The following additional policies apply only to specific subareas of Use Area 7. For example, policy "A" below only applies to areas on the Land Use Map labeled "7A".

Area 7A: Gas stations are allowed here.

Towers

Any new broadcast towers on Lookout Mountain should result in a visual improvement of the mountain by consolidated existing towers. New high-powered towers on Lookout Mountain should not be approved unless all of the following conditions are met:

1. Radio Frequency exposure levels on Lookout Mountain are reduced as a result of the new tower.
2. The new tower is not marked by white strobe lights in the daytime.
3. A condition of the approval includes a RF level monitoring program that includes input from the local residents.
4. Such RF monitoring program shall be funded by the developer, and last in perpetuity.
5. The new tower should have a face area of no more than ½ of that of existing towers to be consolidated on the proposed tower. The existing tower face area must come from towers on Lookout Mountain.
6. No new/additional analog FM broadcast radio antennas or stations.

General Policies

This section contains policies which apply throughout the Central Mountains area. Issues related to air quality, transportation, wildlife, open space, recreation, etc. require a consistent response to ensure that future land development proposals are compatible.

The recommended general intensities listed in this plan should not be construed as guarantees of the maximum intensities of uses that may be built upon a site, but as the maximum intensity that could be built upon a site. The actual intensity of uses is determined by applying all applicable recommendations in this Plan.

Hazards

The protection of the environment, property and life should be considered in the planning and land development review process. All three factors need to be examined to properly locate residential and commercial development, and Colorado law requires counties and municipalities to control land development in areas where existing hazards have been identified.

The intent of the policies in this section is to identify hazards in the Central Mountain Area which should be mitigated or eliminated prior to development, and to identify the governmental entities with the authority to safeguard people, property and the environment from injury or damage caused by hazardous conditions and events.

General

1. In areas where radioactivity exceeds safe levels, land uses should be limited to non-occupied agricultural uses.
2. Protect the public and the environment from the hazards associated with the generation, transportation and disposal of hazardous materials.
3. Fire districts should receive development referrals and construction plans for review to ensure the district has the capacity to respond to fires and emergencies where hazardous materials are present.

Wildfire Hazards

Wildfire is a constant threat faced by mountain area residents. As development and related human activity continues to increase in the Central Mountain area, the risk of damage from wildfire will increase. Therefore, it will be important to reduce the risk of wildfire through maintenance, education, thinning defensible adequate access for fire protection equipment, water supplies and intergovernmental cooperation.

Several forest fuel types may present serious problems for fire protection on any slope. Often, it is not possible for fire fighters and their equipment to protect property and lives where these fuel types are present. Such fuels include, but are not limited to: Gambel Oak, Lodgepole Pine, Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine.

1. Water districts should be encouraged to expand their network of fire hydrants and dry hydrants to areas not presently served.

Naturally Occurring Radiation

Radioactive elements are natural components of the mineral rich rocks of the Front Range. Radon-222, an inert, radioactive gas, is a radioactive decay product of Radium-226 (member of the Uranium-238

decay chain). Radon-222 and Radium-226 are the critical radioactive elements from a health standpoint.

Radon emitted from the earth can accumulate inside buildings where it can become a health hazard. Standards for safety have been set by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. Preventive and corrective measures can be used to avoid and mitigate the hazard. . It is less expensive to mitigate for radon during construction than it is to correct radon problems in existing structures.

Natural radioactive deposits, and other sources such as uranium mine tailings, can also create health-endangering amounts of radiation in groundwater. Some private wells in the area have been identified as having elevated levels of radioactivity, i.e., gross alpha uranium Radium-226. However, only a small fraction of existing wells have been tested by their owners, so the extent of the problem is unknown. Although removal processes are available for these constituents, careful design is required to avoid additional radiation problems. Large scale treatment facilities could engender radiation and waste disposal problems. Currently, there is not a state requirement for testing private wells. The Colorado Geological Survey can be consulted for risk areas before new wells are drilled, and the U.S. Geological Survey's hydrogeological study, when completed, may be a source of information about geological and water relationships which have radiation hazard potential.

Uranium deposits in the Central Mountain Area are not considered suitable for construction purposes by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment..

1. Uranium deposits in the Central Mountain area should not be built upon or used for construction purposes.

Electromagnetic Radiation

There is an increased awareness that health problems may be caused by the emission of electromagnetic radiation (electric and magnetic fields or EMF) which is generated by transmission power lines, electrical substations, telecommunications facilities such as radio and television broadcasting antennae. The Colorado Public Utilities Commission has begun adopting a code concerning EMFs, recognizing "the potential health effects of exposure" and requiring utilities to implement "the concept of prudent avoidance" with respect to planning, siting, construction, and operation of transmission facilities; "prudent avoidance" can include design, routing, height, expanded rights-of-way, and burial of lines. Rule 18 (i), Docket No.92R-259E (effective Nov. 30, 1992).

The current American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards, which do not cover transmission lines, are used by Jefferson County Public Health to assess health hazards, and are less restrictive than the standards used in other areas of the United States. Studies of this problem are underway which could produce more definitive information on the health hazard potential from electromagnetic radiation. Another health concern focuses on the cumulative and interactive effect of the various types of radiation.

1. Development proposals in the vicinity of electromagnetic energy emission sources and proposed major new EMF emission sources should be referred to the Jefferson County Department of Health and Environment for evaluation of health hazards.
2. Protect the public from exposure to potential health hazards caused by electromagnetic radiation (electric and magnetic fields or EMF) by continuing to monitor future studies.

Implementation

1. New development in the Central Mountains Area should utilize radon resistant construction techniques, as outlined in appendices of the International Building Code.

Historic Resources

The Central Mountains area of Jefferson County is rich in geological, paleontological, archaeological, and historical resources which provide links to the past and chronicle change. They are often fragile, limited and nonrenewable, and their destruction would be an irreversible loss to the community. As development occurs, the integrity of these resources should be maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

Geological Resources

Most of the area is a mountainous upland, underlain by resistant igneous and metamorphic rocks. The upland has an abrupt slope along its east margin and is incised by streams flowing in large and small canyons. The Fountain Formation's Red Rocks are composed of limestone, sandstone and shale that was eroded from the ancient Rocky Mountains and deposited by streams. The Morrison Formation, which is famous for its content of dinosaur remains, forms the lower west flank of the hogback. The Dakota Group, at the crest of the hogback, was formed from the deposition of sands and muds in estuaries, and a few coaly beds in swamps. Geologic history of the Dakota Group can be explored at the Geologic Cut which was made to accommodate I-70 near the Morrison exit, as well as at the Dinosaur Ridge Visitor Center, the Morrison Natural History Museum and the Colorado School of Mines Museum.

Paleontological & Archaeological Resources

The State of Colorado archaeologist has responsibility for archaeological resources. Examples of these resources include places of early human occupation, areas where evidence of farming or hunting and gathering is found, burial or other funeral remains, aboriginal artifacts, structures dating from prehistoric periods, and paleontological specimens.

The opportunity to excavate archaeological sites is important and ensures a continuing link to information about this area's past inhabitants and geological condition.

Historical Resources

Historic sites, structures, roads, trails, and railways can be found in this area. These historic resources are valued by residents, tourists, historians, governments, geologists, and archaeologists. They can be preserved through identification, classification and protective regulations.

Structures of local, state or national significance are often associated with notable individuals, are works of master architects and builders, or have a unique style typical of the locale or are of a style disappearing from the area.

Cooperation among residents, agencies and governments will be needed to preserve important geological, paleontological, archaeological, and historical resources.

1. Prevent damage to historic resources when development occurs.
2. Ensure that new development is harmonious with the character of existing historic resources.
3. When new development is proposed, the historic resources map should be reviewed to serve as the initial indicator of historic resources in the area.

4. This map and index is not intended to be all-inclusive of historic resources within the Central Mountain area, but rather serves as an alert to the presence of these resources. This map and index should be updated regularly as new resources are identified.

Implementation

1. An incentive program should be considered to expand awareness of the heritage of the Central Mountains area. The incentive program should encourage people to identify and report geological, paleontological, archaeological, and historical finds.
2. Appropriate markers of the historical trails, sites and structures in the area should be placed in appropriate locations where room for automobile parking can be provided safely and aesthetically, e.g., safe pull-off access and without unsightly cuts into the sidewalls of the canyons. An example would be Clear Creek Canyon Road.

Mountain Site Design Criteria

The dramatic beauty of the surrounding natural landscape is a major asset in the mountains. Scenic or high quality elements of the natural landscape need to be maintained or enhanced, while disturbed areas may need to be rehabilitated or enhanced. All development should be integrated, through location and design, with the existing natural character.

The purpose of these criteria is to assist and encourage landowners and their designers in creating high quality development which respects the environment and to encourage creative and flexible approaches to site design. By using the criteria listed below, it is anticipated that more sensitive development will occur. It is encouraged that these criteria be used not only during rezoning and special use cases, but also for subdivision plat, exemptions from platting, and site development plan cases.

The varying characteristics of individual sites will determine which of the following criteria may be applicable. In some cases, all of the criteria may be applicable, while in others, only some may apply. These should be used in conjunction with other site design criteria located throughout the Comprehensive Master Plan.

1. Naturally occurring wet meadows are scarce and should not be disturbed.
2. Group buildings and design development to ensure privacy between homes.
3. Limit large, uninterrupted expanses of parking areas by incorporating landscaping, utilizing building placement, landform, or other techniques. Berms and landscaping are preferred to screen parking lots.
4. Use only wall mounted, under canopy, or monument style signs. Integrate monument signs into the landscape with vegetation, or into the architecture of the buildings.
5. Use privacy (opaque) fences only to provide private areas immediately around buildings or for noise attenuation.
6. Use pitched roofs or a design solution that prevents the appearance of large roof planes.
7. In high wind areas, structures should be sited to avoid adverse impacts from blowing snow on adjacent roads and building entrances.
8. Revegetation of disturbed land in mountain areas is difficult given the lack of irrigation water, the thin layer of top soil, and the short growing season; therefore, land disturbance should be minimized.

9. Preserve existing vegetation for screening and erosion control.

10. Landscaping should emphasize the use of native vegetation that is hardy and drought tolerant. Earth shaping in conjunction with the creative use of rock are alternative techniques which should be considered.

Open Space, Trails & Recreation

Undeveloped, natural land is essential to maintaining the Central Mountains community character and environment.

A wealth of natural open land of great significance exists in the Central Mountains area of Jefferson County. The area has a diversity of topography, geology, vegetation, wildlife, habitats, vistas, streams, trails, and world-class natural features. These are a part of its character, part of the community's pride and identity, and an important part of what attracts residents, visitors, and investment to the area. Open space is more than a treasured resource, it is vital for all living things and, once given up, is forever gone.

Key open space features of the area include:

- Lookout, Genesee, Bald, Lininger, Mt. Morrison, and Mt. Zion mountains,
- The Front Range Mountain Backdrop/Foreground, and
- Clear Creek, Mount Vernon, and Bear Creek Canyons.

Open space protection has a long, productive history in Jefferson County and its Central Mountains area. One hundred years ago, the City and County of Denver launched the historic "Mountain Parks" system. This act required Congressional approval in 1914 for the city to purchase federal lands outside of its municipal limits. Planned by the son of the great 19th Century "Architect of Parks," Frederick Law Olmsted, that vision of a great mountain preserve of national importance with sublime scenery, abundant forests, public playgrounds, and wildlife reserves, all within the immediate reach of the people of Denver and its visitors is as fresh and vital today as it was three-quarters of a century ago.

Residents and other taxpayers have made their views clear on the importance of preserving open space in the Central Mountains area. Government, publicly supported nonprofits, and private communities already have preserved nearly 13,804 acres (21.5 square miles) of the 21,845 acres (34 square miles) included in the Central Mountains area.

These open space figures appear impressive in acres and percent of area. However, many of the natural landscapes and vistas Central Mountains residents and visitors now rely on and assume are "open space" (the area's major canyons, peaks, and the mountain backdrop) remain private, developable land.

Private property owners, even when not opening their lands to the general public, can contribute greatly to open space, preserving vistas, ecosystems, and wildlife areas. Properly protected, present and future open space lands, public and private, can be a "trademark" of Jefferson County an asset for its residents, an economic magnet attracting tourists, new business, and healthy planned growth, and a symbol of public stewardship for the fast-disappearing natural environment.

General

1. Preserve, maintain, and enhance the natural environment and open space character of the Central Mountains Area as a living resource, making sure that development harmonizes with, supports, and does not degrade its natural character.

Public Open Space

The Jefferson County Open Space targeted acquisition strategy that identifies large areas called Conservation Study Areas (CSAs) that have significant wildlife, natural resource, scenic and outdoor recreation values are critical to continuing land preservation in the area. The CSAs contain the majority of priority lands and roughly follow four of the major drainages in our County: Ralston Creek, Clear Creek, Bear Creek and Deer Creek. The areas identified in the 1996 Front Range Mountain Backdrop/Foreground Plan and the 2012 inventory conducted by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program on rare animals, plants, wetlands, riparian areas, plant communities, (and areas of significant biodiversity) are also exceptionally important and deserving of strong public support.

1. Open space emphasis in the Central Mountains area should be primarily on undeveloped, natural areas and trails.
2. Public access should be encouraged, unless sensitive ecosystems, habitat, vegetation, terrain, visual resources, or ecosystem carrying capacity are threatened.

Open Space Priority Areas

Clear Creek Canyon

Clear Creek Canyon is unique among Front Range canyons. Its sheer walls and deep, narrow gorge make it a “world class landform”, ranked with the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument and the Royal Gorge. It is also unique among Front Range canyons in that development has stayed largely on its upper rims, leaving the inner gorge and middle benches in a highly natural state making Denver one of the last great metropolitan areas with such a natural wonder on its doorstep.

The Clear Creek basin contains sweeping vistas of mountains and plains, roaring whitewater, ecosystems from Upper Sonoran desert to subalpine forests, a diversity of wildlife and threatened species, public recreation resources like the Beaver Brook Trail, a treasure trove of Colorado history and pre-history, a scenic highway, and a sport fishery. It is a highly accessible resource open to vehicles on U.S. 6 and the rim roads, and open to hikers via the Beaver Brook and other trails.

The Colorado General Assembly has given it special recognition: “Clear Creek Canyon possesses irreplaceable economic, educational, cultural, biological, and open space attributes of state and regional significance.” (Joint Resolution No. 2, 56th Colorado Gen. Ass’y, 1988.)

1. Clear Creek’s inner gorge and benches are appropriately a top priority for Jefferson County Open Space. The County, land trusts, and private land owners should continue to make acquisition and preservation in Clear Creek Canyon a primary goal.

Mount Vernon Canyon/I-70

The Mount Vernon Canyon/I-70 corridor makes Jefferson County the magnificent “Gateway to the Rockies” for tourists and skiers, and it also provides the principal growth and commuting corridor for residents of the Central Mountains.

The spectacular geologic site of the Dakota Hogback road cut and Jefferson County Open Space Matthews-Winters Park preserves the entrance to the canyon, on both sides of I-70, and is the historic site of Mount Vernon. (See Central Mountains History section.)

The canyon provides travelers driving west from Denver with their first views of undeveloped natural mountain beauty. Even where residential, office, and commercial developments flank the slopes of

the canyon, open space was integrated into those developments. At Exit 254's "Picture Bridge" (framing the first view of the snow-capped Rockies), I-70 leaves Mount Vernon Canyon and enters the Clear Creek watershed. From there, travelers see Genesee Park, with its herds of bison and elk, then sweeping miles-long natural vistas all the way across Clear Creek Canyon.

1. Preservation of the visual resource corridor of I-70 should be a top priority. The natural area from Exits 259-256 should be protected, with emphasis on the Arapahoe East ski area and the Cabrini Shrine properties, which frame the highway. The developed area from Exits 256-254 should be carefully managed to protect visual buffer zones and the communities there.

Bear Creek Canyon

Cut by one of the Rockies' major tributaries, Bear Creek Canyon still exhibits great naturalness abundant wildlife, whitewater rapids, riparian habitat, meadows, cliffs, rock outcrops, towering peaks, and parklands. Its natural attractions, fishery, parks, and trails are accessible via Colorado Highway 74 and side roads, making it a premier scenic, picnicking, and recreation destination for visitors and metro-area residents alike.

Bear Creek Canyon is also a major commuting and access corridor linking Morrison, Idledale, Kittredge, Evergreen, and beyond with the Denver metropolitan area. It remains largely untouched by development, save for Highway 74 running along its base and the two communities of Morrison and Idledale, within or adjacent to the Plan boundaries. The clustered nature of the existing community development does not detract from the miles of undeveloped natural open space characterizing the canyon.

Bear Creek has been a major focus of open space preservation. Thousands of acres of the canyon have already been set aside by Jefferson County Open Space and Denver Mountain Parks.

Policies Regarding Development in the Open Space Priority Areas

1. No existing Jeffco Open Space lands should be allowed to transition or be transferred to a use other than open space.

Priorities for Trails

Additional public trails should be established in the following corridors:

- Clear Creek Canyon segment of the Peaks to Plains Trail; Running 65 miles from the Continental Divide at Loveland Pass to the confluence of the South Platte River Trail in Adams County. The remaining 9 miles of trail between the western end of Clear Creek Canyon at the Jefferson/Clear Creek County line east toward Golden is a high priority.
- Clear Creek Gorge from Golden west along the Welch Ditch past Tunnel #1, then along the river to the Jefferson County line; this trail could link to trails up the North Fork of Clear Creek (in Gilpin County) and the Mainstem (in Clear Creek County).
- Elk Creek from Clear Creek west up the Elk Creek watershed.
- Cold Spring linking the Beaver Brook Trail and Genesee Park, Bear Creek, Little, Lair o' the Bear and Corwina Parks and Kittredge.
- Chimney Gulch links Golden to Lookout Mountain Park and the Nature Center.
- Apex from Apex Park, south to Matthews/Winters Park and north to Windy Saddle.
- Matthews/Winters-Morrison continuing south from Matthews/Winters Park through Red Rocks Park and Morrison to Mt. Falcon Park.
- Sawmill Gulch linking Mount Vernon Canyon south to Bear Creek Canyon, through Idledale.

- Bear Creek Canyon Trail Corridor from Morrison west to Evergreen, linking Red Rocks, Mt. Falcon, Little, Lair o' the Bear, Corwina and O'Fallon Parks. 9 miles of trail remains to be designed and constructed.

New non-motorized bicycle paths should be established, for safety's sake, along the following popular road biking routes:

- U.S. 40 from the plains, up U.S. 40 in Mt. Vernon Canyon to the Jefferson County line (removing the need for bicyclists to use the I-70 expressway).
- Lariat Loop-Lookout Mountain from Golden, up Lookout Mountain on the Lariat Loop Road (westward extension of 19th Street), then south along Lookout Mountain Road to U.S. 40.
- Bear Creek along Colorado Highway 74 from Morrison to Evergreen.

Implementation

1. Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Division should:
 - Review County, state, and federal laws, programs, and policies for disincentives to the protection of open space, move expeditiously to change those that are controlled by the County and lobby for change in those controlled by the state or federal governments;
 - Adopt amendments to Jefferson County regulations to deal effectively with slope, visual impacts, service provision, transferable development rights, hazard areas, and other aspects of the development process which can impede open space protection and future acquisitions.

Public Services & Facilities

The impact of land development on the quality of services should be managed with care to ensure that the provision of public services is consistent, reliable and adequate for the development it serves, and appropriate for the Central Mountains area.

The quality of life in a community depends, in part, on the quality of the schools, neighborhood facilities, emergency services and public utilities. At the same time, the Central Mountains area has a unique mountain character that should be preserved. Therefore, these services should be compatible with this mountain environment and should not be expected to duplicate the level of service found in urban areas. The levels of service provided should be in accord with each area's character. Service provision should not enable or mandate development beyond the levels dictated elsewhere in the Plan.

1. New development should bear the equitable share of the increased demand for, and cost of, new public services required to serve the development.
2. Installation of sprinkler systems should be encouraged in new development, both residential and commercial. When sufficient water pressure is not present, then a modified sprinkler system which protects exit paths should be considered.

Noise

The unique landscape, fresh air, and quiet that characterize different parts of the Plan area are valuable assets that attract new residents and employers. Careful attention to enhancing and maintaining these natural attributes as development occurs can help ensure a highly desirable quality of life in the Central Mountains.

Lack of noise is part of the character of the rural community in the Central Mountains Area. The Central Mountains area enjoys a relatively low noise level. It has been estimated that the ambient level in the Plan area is between 30 and 45 decibels. The exception to this is the I-70/Mt. Vernon Canyon transportation corridor which generates considerably higher levels.

1. High noise levels associated with certain land uses should not be considered compatible unless mitigation can decrease the number of noise sources or alter how the noise is heard.

Transportation

Maintaining the mountain community character of the Central Mountains area is a primary concern of residents. This concern is followed closely by the desire to protect the scenic corridors along the Lariat Loop National Scenic Byway.

While the existing limited road network in the Central Mountains area serves the present needs of residents and commuters, traffic from future development, including build-out of existing zoning on some segments, could exceed acceptable levels of service on the roads. Without proper planning, the topography of the area could significantly constrain expansion of existing roads. In addition, the financial cost could be prohibitive and the visual impact unacceptable to the community.

The different priorities of local residents and travelers through the community should be resolved in a way that preserves the visual amenities and the open lands character of the mountain community.

1. Protect the scenic corridor along the Lariat Loop National Scenic Byway.
2. The transportation system should provide local road links that foster a sense of community.
3. Level of Service C (LOS C) should be the standard for Central Mountains Area roads, with LOS D acceptable during peak hours. When LOS D expands into nonpeak hours, road improvements which can extend the capacity of the roads should be considered for the community, with a program for funding and timetables established to prevent further decline in levels of service.

Given these system constraints, the Plan fully recognizes that during certain times of the day, a lower LOS may occur on certain area road segments, which will result in more congested roadways. Some additional congestion is preferred over major roadway widening.

4. New zoning within the planning area should not be approved when the traffic generated would result in LOS D or lower on existing road segments within the Central Mountains Area. An exception should be allowed when prior agreements exist that commit public, private or combined public and private money to fund future road improvements which would result in acceptable levels of service, would satisfy environmental concerns and would be constructed within 5 years.

5. Development should be phased when the traffic generated by a proposed development will have the following impacts:

- Degrade the level of service below the acceptable LOS D during peak periods on the roads in the community.
- Exceed road conditions and the County's maintenance capability.
- Use roads that cannot be improved to meet traffic demands safely because of physical constraints and that would have adverse visual and community character impacts. Prior to the decision of new development, the phasing should address the issue of equitable use of road capacity by existing and zoned land uses.

6. County roads should be limited to two through lanes with appropriate turning, acceleration and deceleration lanes, climbing lanes and other safety improvements.

Specific roads and intersections which should be improved to reduce accidents and eliminate existing hazardous situations include:

Grapevine Road: This is used as a two-way road, and the lane widths are inadequate for the traffic. This problem is exacerbated by deep ditches and cars parked along the road. This road is unsafe now, and future development would require upgrading which might result in condemnation of buildings built at the edge of the road. Improvement of Grapevine Rd. within Idledale needs to be very sensitively handled.

Pine Road: This is the only access into Cody Park. The road is too narrow and too easily blocked, especially during winter months. An emergency access/egress route has been developed through the coordinated efforts of the residents of Cody Park, private land-owners, and the Foothills Fire Protection District. However, a second permanent access road into this subdivision should be explored to protect the safety of the Cody Park residents. The number of residences presently exceed the number allowed under current cul-de-sac requirements. If a second access cannot be created, a reduction in density permitted should be explored.

Lookout Mountain Road near Larkspur Drive: The curve is unsafe, and excessive amounts of gravel contribute to accidents at this location. Snow and ice on the road further increases the danger here.

Charros Road and Decker Drive: These roads should be studied to determine what improvements can be made to reduce accidents on them.

Implementation

1. The Land Development Regulation should be amended to create new construction standards for mountain roads which are more sensitive to the environment and are safe and functional. Private roads within developments should be allowed to develop below County standards, provided Jefferson County Public Works Department's and fire district's objectives for access, maintenance and safety can be met.

2. The County should try to acquire the necessary right-of-way on heavily traveled roads which are not maintained because of the lack of right-of-way.

3. Where private roads are maintained by the County through prescriptive right, the County should work with the owner to clarify the survey and legal description, then dedicate the property used as a public road to the County to reduce the property tax obligation.

4. Existing and new road placement standards should be considered by the County to reduce the visual impact associated with road cuts in mountain areas.

5. Signage implementation as follows:

- I-70 at Exit 256: The stop signs at this intersection are confusing and should be changed.
- Signage within the Central Mountains should be consolidated to avoid confusion and visual clutter. Sign colors should be standardized and designed to be compatible with the surrounding environment. Back sides of signs should be painted or constructed with earth tone colors or materials.

6. Parking implementation as follows: Additional parking should be considered at Lariat Loop Road and Beaver Brook Trailhead because of the increased use of the trail. Overflow parking creates a traffic hazard.

Visual Resources

The visual resources of the Central Mountains area are spectacular and extremely valuable both to residents and investors, as well as the millions of visitors from around the world who travel through it. The area is Jefferson County's "Gateway to the Rockies", with sweeping vistas of mountains, canyons, rivers, geologic forms, forests, meadows, and sky.

Mountain residents and investment are attracted by the spaciousness available between homes and between developments. The views and openness are a very significant part of the area's quality of life.

Because of its especially important visual qualities, development throughout the Central Mountains area should be designed to complement the landscape, not degrade it. Protection of visually sensitive areas is a priority because they are critical to the composition and unique character of the foothills landscape. Minimizing visual disruption through sensitive site planning is also critical because the ecosystem is fragile, vegetation can be sparse, and scars on the landscape heal slowly. Therefore, development proposals, particularly rezoning requests, within or adjacent to these resources, must be carefully considered and judged against the recommendations set forth in this section.

Prominent Features and Views

Visual resources identified as especially important including Open areas (public and private) such as:

- Genesee Park, including the bison pastures
- Apex Park
- Matthews-Winter Park
- Red Rocks Park
- Little Park
- Rilliet Park Meadow
- Mother Cabrini Shrine acreage
- Girl Scout Camp
- Mt. Vernon Country Club's Custer Addition

Peaks, such as:

- Lookout Mountain
- Mount Morrison
- Bald Mountain
- Mount Zion
- Genesee Mountain

Views and vistas such as:

- The breathtaking panoramic view of the Rockies from the "Picture Bridge" (I-70 Exit 254)
- Pastoral views along Grapevine Road
- City and canyon views along the Lariat Loop National Scenic Byway
- Sweeping views across Clear Creek Canyon from Lookout Mountain, from the Mt. Vernon Country Club and residences, from the Beaver Brook Trail, and from I-70 between Exits 252 and 254
- Long vistas down the valley between the hogback and the face of the Foothills

Views into and out of the area, which are also important because they are unique and seen by many, including:

- The mountain/foothills backdrop seen from the metropolitan area
- Guy Gulch
- Centennial Cone
- Mount Tom
- Douglas Mountain
- City (lights) view to the east
- Large rock outcrop south of Idledale across Bear Creek Canyon
- Scenic corridors, particularly:
 - I-70 and U.S. Highway 40
 - Bear Creek Canyon
 - Clear Creek Canyon
 - Beaver Brook Trail
 - County Highway 93/Colorado Highway 26

Scenic Corridors

While prominent features and views are especially important to residents, the scenic corridors are also sensitive for commuters and tourists whose impression is formed solely from their perspective on the paved highways that wind through the area. The corridors (I-70, Colorado Highway 74, and the Lariat Loop National Scenic Byway) are delineated based on GIS models of what is most visible from these roadways. The more places along these roads that can see a certain location, the higher the weighting in the model. The end result is that the most visible areas are identified on the viewshed maps.

Potential for screening is based on site design and the use of native landscaping plants, guaranteed at zoning, which would improve the site's screening capabilities. These might include requiring the installation of mature landscaping and berming.

1. New development within the designated scenic corridors should be screened or mitigated. Mitigation techniques should include:

- a. the use of dark, receding colors;
- b. architecture which is low contrast and doesn't dominate the site; and
- c. a low level of site disturbance and a high level of natural screening.
- d. Fencing, should not be used as a method to improve the site's screening capabilities.
- e. When overhead service lines must be installed, such lines should be planned to blend with the natural landscape. Powerlines should follow contours when possible. Ridges should be crossed at the lowest points, e.g., along a drainage swale or saddle. Powerline rights-of-way should be feathered through forested areas rather than clearcut. Powerline structures and lines should be dark in color to recede into the landscape rather than be visually obtrusive.

4. Billboards, i.e., signs not related to the business on the site, should not be allowed.

5. Fencing materials should blend with the natural landscape. They should be of a natural material or man-made material which has a natural appearance.

Implementation

1. The County should explore adopting regulations which adequately restrict development on important natural features such as rock outcroppings, steep slopes (over 40%), and atop ridgelines.
2. Review the appropriateness of the Jefferson County zoning regulations for the keeping of livestock as they relate to: soils, topography, and erosion; water contamination, odor, flies, and other public health issues; and humane treatment of the animals.
3. The County's Lookout Mountain maintenance facility should be substantially landscaped on all sides and painted a darker color to minimize its visual impact. The community should be involved in planning for improvements to this site.
4. Rock cuts* should have their visual impact minimized by rock staining which complements the natural surrounding landscape. Rock cuts should be vertical.

* *Rock cut is defined as an excavation in competent bedrock.*

Water & Sanitation

The physical availability of water will be a key factor in the development of the Central Mountains area. The health and safety of the community's residents and its environment depend on an adequate and safe supply of water. Proper planning and maintenance of the quantity and quality of the water is essential.

Land development affects both the supply of and demand for water within an area and must be managed. Some residents in the community are served by water districts or water and sanitation districts. Some of these districts rely on surface water (streams) for their supply, while others rely on wells. Other residents depend on individual well and septic tank/leach field systems.

Improper treatment or disposal of effluent can result in ground water and surface water contamination. Because of this correlation, the impacts of existing and future development on this sensitive resource should be studied and managed to ensure safe and adequate supplies of water.

Regulations on minimum lot sizes and the keeping of livestock are needed to protect the integrity of this resource. Restrictions are necessary to protect the quality of both surface water and ground water in areas with steep slopes, poor soil profiles and/or drainageways, gullies, etc. The community's groundwater supplies must be protected from significant depletion and contamination.

1. Identify existing water contamination sources and mitigate or eliminate them.
2. For lots on individual wells, the overall (gross) density of a project should be at least 1 du/5 acres.
3. Whenever practical for the general public good, the consolidation of water and/or water and sanitation districts should be examined and encouraged.
4. In New Development for livestock, the maximum number of large animals should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In no case should the maximum number of large animals exceed one per acre. The assessment should be based on information from the property owner that demonstrates through technical, site-specific reports that the lot contains adequate natural conditions (e.g., soils, slopes, vegetation) to accommodate animals without adversely affecting ground or surface water, either on site or downstream, or causing accelerated soil erosion.

Wildlife

The Central Mountains area affords residents and visitors an immense opportunity to experience, learn from, and live with a wide variety of plants, wildlife and their habitats.

In this area, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, elk, whitetail and mule deer, fox, coyote, marten, beaver, trout, songbirds, wild turkey, grouse, hawks, and bald and golden eagles still roam, swim, and soar within sight of Denver skyscrapers. Rare and threatened plants, fragile wetlands, and a range of habitats from near-desert to subalpine provide incredible biodiversity here at the suburban fringe.

Wildlife, including both plants and animals, enhances the area's quality of life, augments property and other values, attracts residents and investment, contributes to human psychological well being, and provides a barometer of the health of our ecosystem. These are valuable assets, not to be squandered. The relationships among animals, vegetation, and human activities, and their direct and cumulative impacts on each other, must be addressed as part of every development proposal.

While wildlife and biodiversity are renewable resources, restorable through their own natural regenerative processes up to a point, human impacts, development, and neglect can cause irreversible damage to these valuable resources. Conversely, wildlife can endanger human inhabitants, and educational and other protective measures must be taken to minimize conflicts between wild animals and people. A conscious regard for wildlife, habitat, and biodiversity should be exercised at every phase of human development projects initial planning, government approval, site preparation, construction, sale and resale.

1. New development should accommodate and protect wildlife, with care given to the maintenance, rehabilitation, and enhancement of their habitat.
2. Appropriate buffers should be provided between human activity and Maximum Quality wildlife habitat. The extent of these buffers should be defined in consultation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and should consider the needs of wildlife for cover, food supply, water, and safety from predation by domestic animals.
3. No structures, grading, or fences which impede wildlife should occur within the Maximum Quality wildlife habitats. Road crossings in these habitats should be avoided but may be allowed if they are designated on an Official Development Plan, their location is the only viable option to access developable land, and their presence does not unreasonably affect the viability of these habitats.
4. Natural, non-significantly impacted, and recovered biotic communities (areas with no current evidence of recent, onsite human development) should have a wildlife inventory prepared prior to any development or development approval.
5. The introduction of plant materials not indigenous to the area, which might cause a degradation of the ecosystem, should be avoided.

Maps

All maps related to the Comprehensive Master Plan can be access through **jMap**, Jefferson County's online interactive mapping application. This can be viewed on any computer or mobile device.

jMap is made up of mapping layers that can be turned on or off. "PZ Comprehensive Master Plan" is the name of the layer that displays the Land Use Recommendations. Once that layer is selected by clicking the check mark by the name, a view of the Area Plan Boundaries will be shown. The data displayed is scale-dependent, meaning once you zoom in to the map the specific recommendations will appear. The red Activity Centers have a further scale-dependent aspect that will show recommendations within the Activity Center.

Clicking on a parcel or area creates a pop-up with information about the Comprehensive Master Plan, details about that specific recommended land use, as well as links to the overall plan and any supplemental maps significant to that specific area. To see all the information for the layers currently turned on, it may be necessary to click the next feature arrow at the top of the pop-up to scroll through all available pages.