

Boulder, Colorado – United States

Introduction:

Mission statement of Master Plan: “Provide a broad spectrum of opportunities to renew, restore, refresh, and recreate, balancing often stressful lifestyles”

Open Space and Mountain Parks Provisions in the City of Boulder Charter:

1. Preservation or restoration of natural areas characterized by or including terrain, geological formations, flora, or fauna that is unusual, spectacular, historically important, scientifically valuable, or unique, or that represent outstanding or rare examples of native species;
2. Preservation of water resources in their natural or traditional state, scenic areas or vistas, wildlife habitats, or fragile ecosystems;
3. Preservation of land for passive recreation use, such as hiking, photography or nature study, and if specifically designated, bicycling, horseback riding, or fishing;
4. Preservation of agricultural uses and land suitable for agricultural production;
5. Utilization of land for shaping the development of the city, limiting urban sprawl and disciplining growth;
6. Utilization of land to prevent encroachment on floodplains; and
7. Preservation of land for its aesthetic or passive recreational value and its contribution to the quality of life of the community.

Major Components:

Connective Corridors

The Boulder Greenways System is a network of green corridors throughout the city that provides alternate transportation routes for pedestrians and bicyclists, while also facilitating opportunities for recreation and cultural experiences. The greenways work to protect riparian, floodplain, and wetland areas, improve stream water quality through buffer zones, and provide appropriate storm drainage. The Greenways program started as the Boulder Creek Project in 1984 and has extended to include corridors along several of the Boulder Creek tributaries, including Fourmile Canyon Creek, Bear Canyon Creek, Skunk Creek, Goose Creek, Wonderland Creek, and South Boulder Creek. Currently, this riparian-based corridor system anchors 200 miles of pedestrian and bike trails.

In addition to the riparian greenways, the city of Boulder boasts an extensive urban forestry program, a department of Parks and Recreation, which maintains over 40,000 trees along streets and on city owned land. More than 330,000 trees have been planted here over the last century and a half and now cover 23% of urban areas (Boulder Area Sustainability Information Network 2004).

Anchors

A greenbelt formed by mountains surrounds the city of Boulder. The boundary formed by the greenbelt, known as *Mountain Parks*, puts a physical limit on urban sprawl and provides easy city access to undeveloped natural areas. The greenbelt contains over 130 miles of maintained trails and spans 6,500 acres. Rock climbing areas, mountain bike trails, and education programs at Flagstaff Mountain’s Summit Nature Center provide

additional opportunities for open space use. The Mountain Parks includes Heil Valley Ranch, which consists of 4923 acres of backcountry open space that serves as valuable wildlife habitat.

The 540 acre Boulder reservoir, located in Northeast Boulder, functions as a second open space anchor by providing wildlife habitat and human recreation opportunities. The reservoir is almost entirely surrounded in undeveloped, natural area, with a small portion of the perimeter developed for human recreation. The reservoir includes a roosting osprey area, which Parks and Recreation seasonally closes to human use in order to preserve habitat integrity.

Valmont City Park and Central Park also serve as open space anchors. At 132 acres, Valmont is the largest park in the Boulder city park system. It contains a large open areas, playgrounds, and recreation facilities. Boulder Central Park is notable for its central location in the city. It is adjacent to the city farmers market and is the site of the Bandshell, a event venue, making it a popular and important green space for Boulder residents (Visitors Open Space Mountain Parks Master Plan).

Civic, Downtown and Social Places

Despite its relatively small size, the city of Boulder has a vibrant downtown with many civic and cultural opportunities. The Pearl Street Mall, located in downtown Boulder, is an outdoor mall of retail shops and cafes. It is also the site of art festivals and street entertainment. A pop-jet fountain and children's rock garden accentuate the mall's outdoor focus. Other valued civic elements include the Boulder Public Library, the Boulder Museum for Contemporary Art, and the University of Colorado.

Neighborhood Parks

As of 1996, Boulder had over 434 acres at 50 sites devoted to urban parks. These parks include Harlow Platts Park, East Boulder Community Park, and Foothills Community Park, which are larger community parks. There are also several smaller, pocket parks, such as North Boulder Park, Greenleaf Park, and Scott Carpenter Park. One especially notable park is Chautauqua Park, which contains recreational facilities and historic relics, as it was founded in 1878. Additionally, Chautauqua Park contains trailheads for several Mountain Parks trails and therefore serves as an important link in the open space system. Neighborhood parks are valued as sites for active recreation that complement three indoor recreation/community facilities (OSMP Visitor Master Plan; Boulder Parks and Rec. Master Plan).

Funding Mechanisms:

Issues & Contemporary Initiatives:

The population of Boulder continues to increase rapidly, and the city recognizes the burden this trend could have on open space quality and acreage. Currently, there are multiple initiatives that attempt to address the need to preserve and improve open space in the face of these changes. Many of these proposals are outlined in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Open Space and Mountain Parks Visitor Master Plan, and the Greenways Program Master Plan.

Despite the increasing human population, the OSMP Visitor Master Plan outlines plans for open space acquisition. A 2006 plan states a goal of acquiring 11,000 additional open space acres, focusing on property that is most threatened by development, adjacent to or near existing open space, or containing prime riparian areas and wildlife habitat. In addition to acquisition, current master plans call for improvement and development of existing parks, renovation of Parks and Rec. facilities (swimming pools, trails, buildings, playgrounds), and improvement of historical and cultural facilities.

Boulder's aggressive strategy for maintaining quality open space is admirable. However, the impressive amount of wilderness, parks, and other open space limits area available for human habitation, and building height restrictions and zoning laws compound the issue. The Boulder open space policies have clear consequences, such as elevated housing prices and population booms in neighboring towns, which should be considered when assessing their success or applicability to other cities.

Lessons Learned:

What Works:

- Easy access to a wide variety of beautiful natural settings
- A wide range of user groups, pursuing activities from passive to active recreation, can enjoy open spaces
- Self-imposed tax for demonstrates a high level of civilian support for open space and wilderness area

Room for Improvement:

- Wildlife habitat patches are limited in extent and distribution
- Connections between individual trails and between trail networks are often weak
- Increasing crowding and consequent user group conflicts

Story in a Box:

It is estimated that over 500 vertebrate species, which is about half of the total species found in all of Colorado, use the Open Space Mountain Parks area (VMP p. 13).

It is estimated that over 500 vertebrate species, which is about half of the total species found in all of Colorado, use the Open Space Mountain Parks area (VMP p. 13).

Resources:

Boulder Mountain Parks Resource Protection and Visitor Use Plan. 1999. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. <http://www.osmp.org>.

Boulder Public Works Greenways Program:

www.ci.boulder.co.us/publicworks/depts/utilities/projects/greenways/index.htm.

City of Boulder, Colorado Official Home Page. <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us>.

City of Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan. 2000.

<http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/parks-recreation>.

ERSys.com: Boulder, Colorado. <http://www.ersys.com/usa/08/0807850/density.htm>.

Total Boulder website: <http://totalboulder.com/resources/53.html>

Visitor Master Plan. April 2005. City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks.

<http://www.osmp.org>.

Library pic: <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/comm/Gallery>

Pearl St. pic: <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/comm/Gallery>

Reservoir: <http://totalboulder.com/resources/53.html>

Density pic: <http://www.ersys.com/usa/08/0807850/density.htm>

Boulder w. church: <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us>

Logos: <http://www.osmp.org>

Greenways logo:

www.ci.boulder.co.us/publicworks/depts/utilities/projects/greenways/index.htm

