



Estes Valley Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan

The Future of Open Space in the Estes Valley



© Jim Ward

DEDICATION

This Plan is dedicated to the greater Estes Valley community for their commitment to conservation and sustainable growth.

The cedar waxwing is a silky, shiny songbird with a black mask and brown crest. It can be found in open woodlands and backyards. Permanently protecting land and healthy streams will help ensure these birds continue to find suitable habitat in the Estes Valley.

*Cover Photo: Sunset bathes the Estes Valley in Rocky Mountain National Park.
© Christian Collins*

MESSAGE FROM THE ESTES VALLEY LAND TRUST
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AUGUST 2020

The Estes Valley has a rich history. Prehistoric Native Americans were drawn to the Valley and surrounding mountains and stone hunting blinds can still be found on ridges across the Valley. The Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne were among the tribes that frequented the Valley to hunt game. And in the 1850s, homesteaders moved into the Valley in search of gold, to raise cattle, and to support hungry prospectors. Early tourists soon followed, awed by the breathtaking scenery. The mountains and plentiful wildlife have a long history of attracting people to the Estes Valley.

Today is no different. More than 4.5 million people visit Rocky Mountain National Park each year. And thanks to the efforts of Enos Mills and others, a large portion of the Estes Valley will always be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. Donors and volunteers with the Estes Valley Land Trust have also stepped up and preserved another nearly 10,000 acres of land to buffer the Park and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest and keep Estes Park and surrounding areas open and natural.

But how will the Valley change in the future? As Colorado’s Front Range continues to grow and visitation to the Estes Valley increases, is there a tipping point where our mountain communities change and the special qualities of the Estes Valley are lost forever? This Plan recognizes our colorful past and strives to protect what makes the Estes Valley unique. I hope you will join me in celebrating this beautiful Valley and its people, wildlife and natural environment, and work with the land trust and our partners to preserve its special qualities forever.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Boring
Executive Director
Estes Valley Land Trust

August 2020 - Draft Plan

The Big Thompson Canyon, an important travel and ecosystem corridor, experienced extreme flooding in 2013. Land conservation can mitigate disaster events by protecting watersheds.



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THANK YOU

to the greater Estes Valley community for your countless contributions and, especially, our project sponsors that made this Plan possible.





Introduction

CONTINUING THE VISION

Over one hundred years ago, a small group of locals dreamed a dream as grand as a national park. In fact, the original 1,000-square-mile concept was even more ambitious – only one-third of the original proposal was actually included within the final boundaries of Rocky Mountain National Park.

Enos Mills’ plea issued over 100 years ago still rings true: “Around Estes Park, Colorado, are mountain scenes of exceptional beauty and grandeur. In many respects this section is losing its wild charms. Extensive areas ... have been misused and ruined ... These scenes are already extensively used as places of recreation. If they are to be permanently and more extensively used and preserved, it will be necessary to hold them and protect them.”

This Estes Valley Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan builds on the long history of establishing land conservation and outdoor recreation as staples of the Estes Valley. While past conservation efforts have primarily relied on landowners’ initiative, this Plan looks to provide an intentional path forward, not only for conservation but for sustainable development as well.

COMMUNITY VISION

Through extensive public outreach, cooperation with community partners, and use of the best available data, the following vision was developed:

We envision a resilient and charming Estes Valley with snow-capped peaks, healthy forests and meadows, clean water, interconnected wildlife habitat, close-knit and inclusive mountain communities that celebrate nature and work together to preserve it, and residents who live active lifestyles and support a strong and diverse economy.

The Estes Valley should continue to be a beautiful and healthy place to live and visit. Our vision includes:

- Healthy wildlife, habitat, and ecosystems
- Sustainable outdoor recreation for all
- Preserved historic resources that tell our story
- Beautiful views of our iconic landscape
- Sustainable growth that strengthens our economy

Our Backyard

THE ESTES VALLEY REGION

For this Plan, the greater Estes Valley encompasses all the public and private land in the Estes Valley School District and Estes Valley Recreation and Park District. This includes the towns of Estes Park, Drake, Glen Haven, Pinewood Springs, and Allenspark as well as portions of unincorporated Larimer and Boulder counties. However, since much of the western part of the Estes Valley is already conserved within Rocky Mountain National Park, as seen on the map to the right, the maps throughout the Plan focus on primarily unconserved areas.

The greater Estes Valley encompasses a wide diversity of ecosystems, including montane, subalpine, and riparian, and undeveloped foothills. It hosts abundant populations of elk, deer, raptors, and unusual wildlife, and sweeping views of the Continental Divide. The Valley also supports a vibrant outdoor recreation economy and charming mountain towns. The landscape and sky offer many natural wonders – birds returning and wildflowers blooming in spring, the tracks of a mountain lion, the brilliance of the Milky Way, and the experience of serenity in a wild place. For generations visitors have come to the Valley for a variety of activities across all seasons, especially as a summer respite, and to be close to this unique natural landscape.

BY THE NUMBERS

STUDY AREA
ACRES

329,000

Estes Valley Recreation District + School District 2019

ACRES CONSERVED
by Estes Valley Land Trust

9,716

Estes Valley Land Trust 2020

16 PEAKS OVER
13,000 FEET

USGS 2019

15 Threatened &
Endangered Species

USFWS 2019

12,400
Estes
Valley
Population

Estes Housing Needs Assessment 2016

National Park Visitors

4.6 MILLION

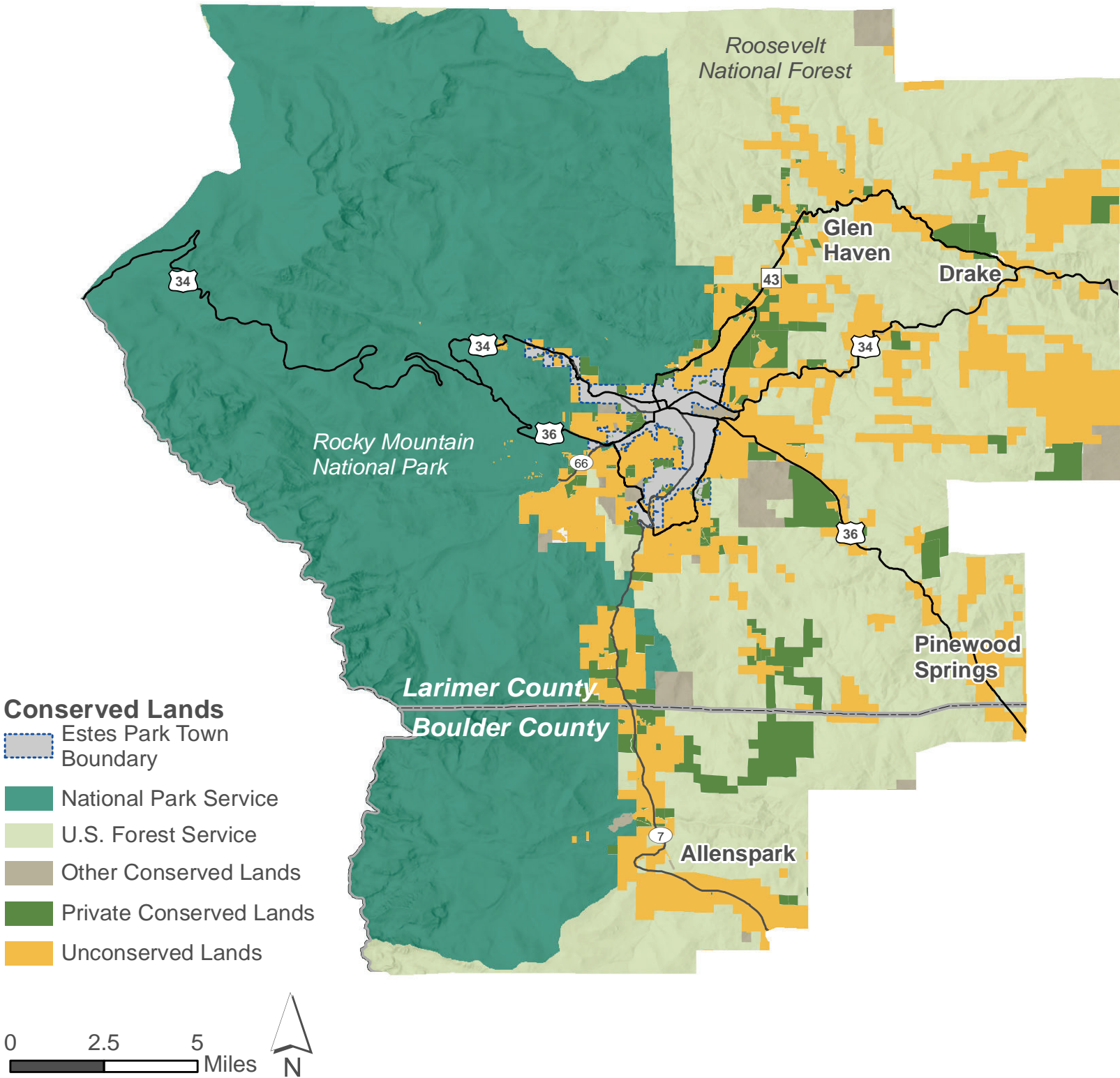
Annual Report Rocky Mountain Nation Park 2019

29% Jobs in lodging and
food services

Estes Housing Needs Assessment 2016

\$16.3 M SALES TAX COLLECTIONS
(Town of Estes Park)

Total Annual for 2019, Town of Estes Park Monthly Economic Dashboard



A CASE FOR CONSERVATION

Changes in land use, increases in visitation, and population growth throughout Colorado and the Estes Valley put pressure on natural resources. Much of Colorado’s growth (100,000 people per year since 2015) has been in the Denver Metro and Northern Colorado area; within a short drive of the Estes Valley. According to the US Census, Estes Valley’s population has grown at a rate of nearly 7.8 percent between 2010 and 2017. Development can destroy or fragment the Valley’s wildlife habitat and remove opportunities for access to public lands. Highlighting ideal areas for conservation can help direct future development to more suitable areas.

In addition to development impacts, the Estes Valley also experiences pressure from visitors. Rocky Mountain National Park has seen an increase in visitation from 2.9 million visitors in 2010 to 4.6 million visitors in 2019. If unmanaged, this increase in visitation can harm wildlife and overwhelm trailheads and other recreation facilities.

Climate change represents another impact to the natural environment in numerous ways, including reducing snow cover and the availability of water, prolonging drier conditions more conducive to invasive weeds and pests as well as wildfire, and shrinking habitat for alpine plants and animals. This Plan will identify land conservation and outdoor recreation priorities to help offset climate impacts.



WHY PROTECT OPEN SPACE?

Protected open space is land that is largely undeveloped and conserved forever. These lands provide a multitude of ecosystem services, including cleaning air and filtering water, storing carbon, and providing flood control. Protected open space does more than sustain a healthy ecosystem and provide wildlife habitat. It also protects the iconic views and incredible natural scenery that are so central to the tourism and recreation-based economy of the Estes Valley. Protected open space creates opportunities where we can discover the wild and commune with nature. It can also preserve our history and deepen our connection with the land and our ancestors.

WHY PROVIDE OUTDOOR RECREATION?

Besides the obvious fun and personal health benefits, outdoor recreation allows people from all backgrounds and ethnicities to experience success by achieving personal goals, enhancing social interaction, and releasing endorphins, which decrease stress and depression. It typically provides a free or low-cost opportunity for people to connect with nature, discover adventure, and be inspired by breathtaking views. For many in Colorado, outdoor recreation is a way of life, a part of their personal, family, and community identity.



Conservation Priorities

HOW WE DEVELOPED OUR PRIORITIES

It takes the joint efforts of a community to conserve open lands and provide sustainable outdoor recreation. The partners in this effort are diverse, representing land managers, recreationists, the business community, and other community members in the Valley. They share the goals of conserving areas that reflect community values; providing inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities; seeking responsible development for housing, businesses, and civic amenities; and supporting a sustainable, strong economy.

Many of these groups have partnered with the Estes Valley Land Trust to conserve or enhance open space in the past. For example, Hermit Park Open Space was made possible by a number of partners, including the Estes Valley Land Trust and Larimer County. Mrs. Walsh’s Garden is supported by a partnership between Estes Valley Land Trust and the Town of Estes Park. All of these groups recognize that we can achieve more by working together and creating shared conservation priorities.

The conservation priorities highlighted in this Plan are based on the values of the Estes Valley community. Residents of Allenspark, Drake, Estes Park, Glen Haven, Pinewood Springs, and unincorporated Larimer and Boulder counties shared their values by completing surveys and attending public events. For example, residents indicated a strong interest for more land conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation across the Valley. Maps in this Plan identify where land conservation and new outdoor recreation is desired.

415
Community Survey
RESPONDENTS

100
Love Our Lands Social
ATTENDEES

Wildlife Habitat

Sustain a Healthy Ecosystem

In an era when biodiversity is decreasing worldwide, many rare and intrinsically valuable species make the Estes Valley their home. From Longs Peak’s summit at 14,259 feet to 6,000 feet of elevation in the Big Thompson Canyon, the greater Valley includes rich foothills and alpine, subalpine, montane, and riparian ecosystems. It showcases herds of elk, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and mule deer; predators such as black bears, coyotes, and mountain lions; and eagles, hawks, and numerous other bird species. Fifteen threatened or endangered species, such as the greenback cutthroat trout and the boreal toad, also inhabit the Valley.

Additionally, suitable habitat for 30 *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* has been identified in the Estes Valley, including for the Townsend’s big-eared bat and the pygmy shrew, and an additional 13 uncommon plants grow here (Colorado State Wildlife Action Plan 2015). Headwater lakes and streams support a superlative ecosystem that provides not only a sustaining environment for flora and fauna but also clean drinking water for locals and the Front Range population.

Protecting native plants and animals is best guaranteed through habitat conservation. Big-game populations tend to inhabit many of the areas that people do – the valley floor and along rivers, especially in the winter season. Climate change, extreme weather, invasive weeds, and fire suppression are altering the Valley’s wildlife habitat and forest structure and resulting in an extended fire season with potentially more frequent and catastrophic fires. With less land available and more competition (i.e., human use) for the remainder, wildlife habitat must be more connected and of higher quality than ever before.

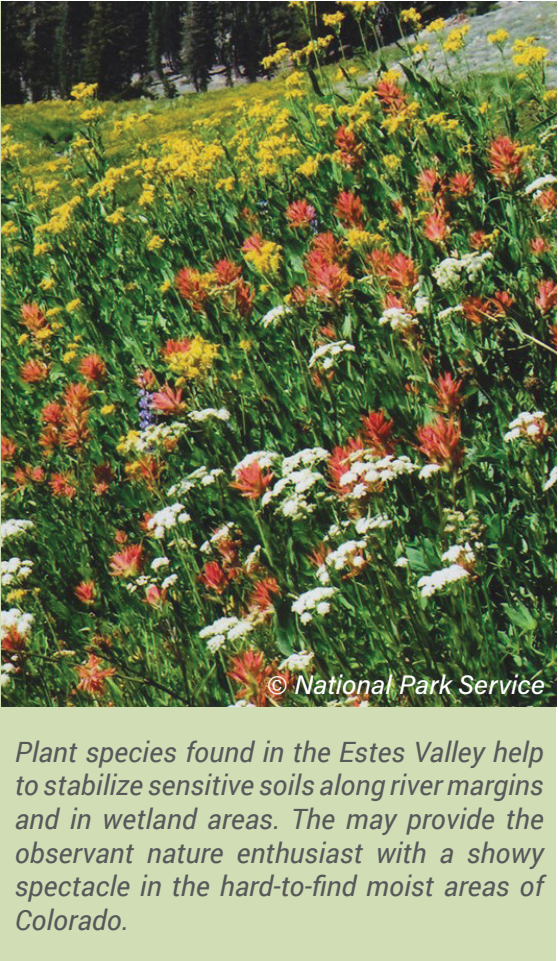
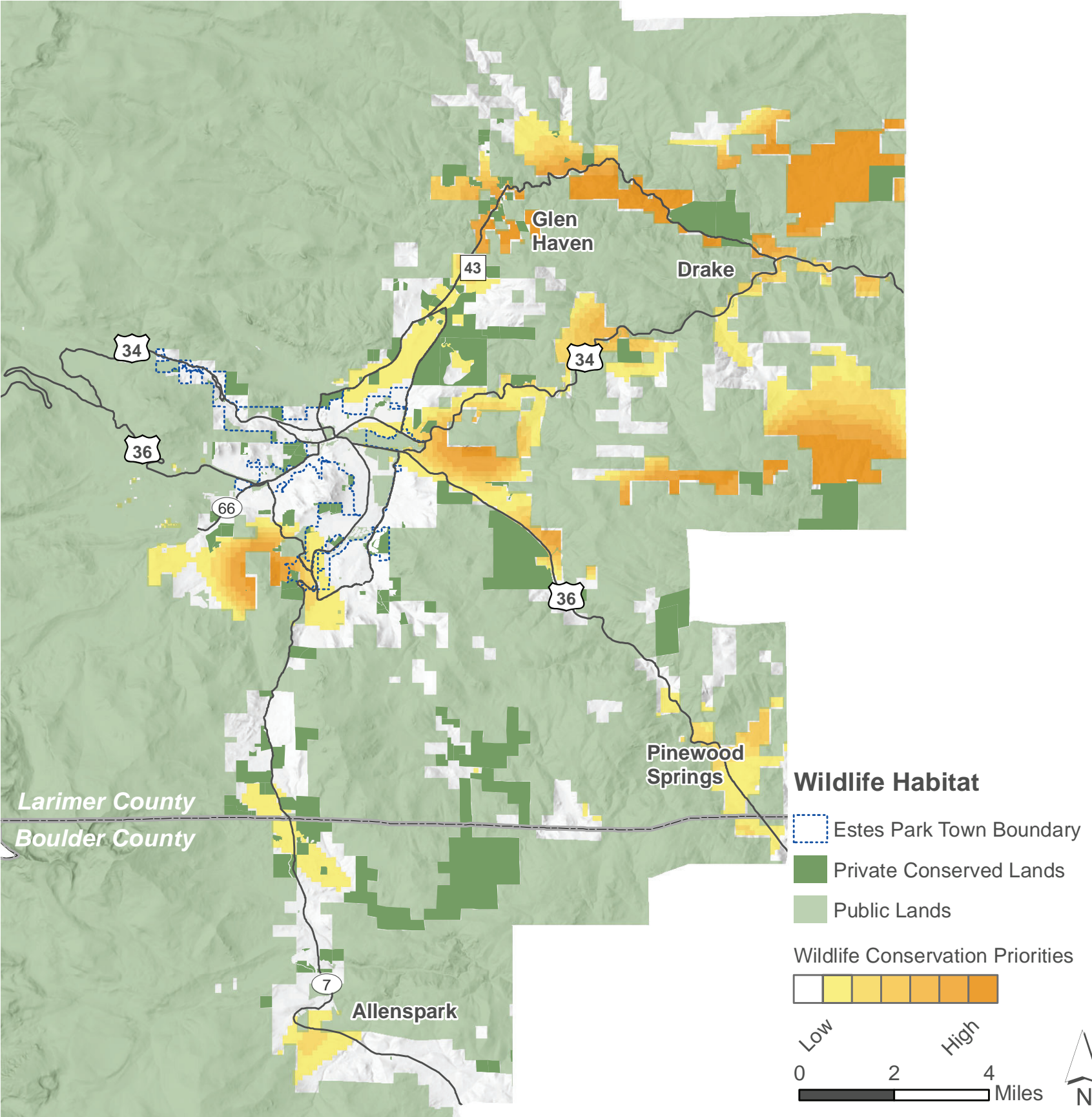


PIET AND HELEN HONDIUS

Piet was one of the founders of the Estes Valley Land Trust in 1987, and he and his wife, Helen, served on the Board of Directors for many years. Over many decades, the Hondinuses have made countless contributions to the Estes Valley, its residents and visitors, including donating a 40-acre conservation easement adjacent to Rocky Mountain National Park. The easement helps protect severe winter range habitat for Colorado’s official state animal, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

Above: Piet and Helen enjoying a fall day in 2018.

Left: Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, often seen along Fall River Road and in the Big Thompson Canyon, are a conservation success story. Journals of explorers indicate great numbers of sheep in mountainous areas and along the Front Range of Colorado but the statewide population fell to 3,200 in 1958 and 2,200 in 1970. By 2007 the population rebounded to an estimated 7,040 bighorn sheep.



PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity in the broadest sense refers to the complexity of organisms in an area. It is integral to important chemical and biological processes that support ecosystems. These processes fortify, for example, resistance to catastrophic wildfire and recovery afterwards. To maintain its rich biodiversity, Colorado’s world-class natural resources require increasingly intensive management, such as controlling invasive exotic plants and bolstering the population of imperiled species (e.g., the boreal toad). Big game in particular rely on large habitat blocks and wildlife corridors. Both can be fragmented by commercial and residential development, recreation, and roads.

- **Large habitat blocks** - intact landscapes that provide a diversity of high-quality habitats
- **Wildlife corridors** - migratory and movement corridors between habitat blocks

The biodiversity of the Estes Valley includes rare plant species and sensitive vegetation communities that are very important to the local ecology. Montane riparian forests, which can be found in the Estes Valley, provide an ecological and wildlife benefit disproportionate to their relative rarity. All species and systems together contribute to the rich biodiversity of the Estes Valley.

GOAL

Protect landscape scale migration corridors, riparian corridors, and rare plant and animal habitat to sustain a healthy ecosystem.

PRIORITIES

- Conserve large habitat blocks near Allenspark, the North Fork of the Big Thompson, and private inholdings surrounded by conserved land.
- Increase wildlife corridor connectivity along Highway 34/Big Thompson and the North Fork, near Rocky Mountain National Park and Allenspark, and adjacent to public lands.
- Protect stream corridors and wetlands that feed into the Big Thompson, Little Thompson, Fall, and St. Vrain rivers and their tributaries.
- Work with private landowners and land managers to monitor forest health, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce the spread of invasive weeds.

Open Space and Scenery

Protect Iconic Views

Affectionately referred to as “America’s Switzerland” due to its sweeping views of snowcapped peaks and similarity to the Swiss Alps, the Estes Valley is a dramatic mountainous landscape. The alpine escarpment of Longs Peak, Meeker Mountain and Twin Sisters, along with the other 14 named peaks above 13,000 feet, loom over the valley and create a sense of awe.

Lower elevation mountains and granite peaks, such as those found along Lumpy Ridge or Prospect Mountain, punctuate the green valley floor. Crystal clear waters of the Big and Little Thompson Rivers and the mighty Saint Vrain Creek rush through canyon walls forming pools, wetlands and lush riparian areas near Glen Haven, Drake and Pinewood Springs.

A journey through these picturesque entry corridors are no less memorable than the destination. The Peak to Peak Scenic Byway, travelling through Allenspark along the eastern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park past Longs Peak was established in 1918 and is Colorado’s oldest scenic byway.

Protecting scenery or open space means preserving land that is open and natural, where views are not hindered by billboards or buildings. Many of the Valley’s natural features – the distinctive “Thumb” on Prospect Mountain, Lumpy Ridge, the Twin Owls – have shaped our identity and enjoy protection from future development. Mountain homes perched on prominent ridgelines, and the utilities and roads that serve them, scar mountainsides and take decades to recover. So far, “nature has really blessed Estes Park,” mused local historian James Pickering. “Our mountains contain few minerals, so they weren’t stripped bare by miners, and our winters are very mild so they aren’t scarred by ski runs.” Protecting scenery brings “blanket benefits” of protecting watersheds, habitats, historic landmarks, and ecosystem functions.

Many visitors to the Estes Valley experience the natural scenery from their vehicle and may never hike or recreate outdoors. Just watching the mountains come into view or looking for the valley’s wildlife across a mountain meadow bring joy to millions of people every year.

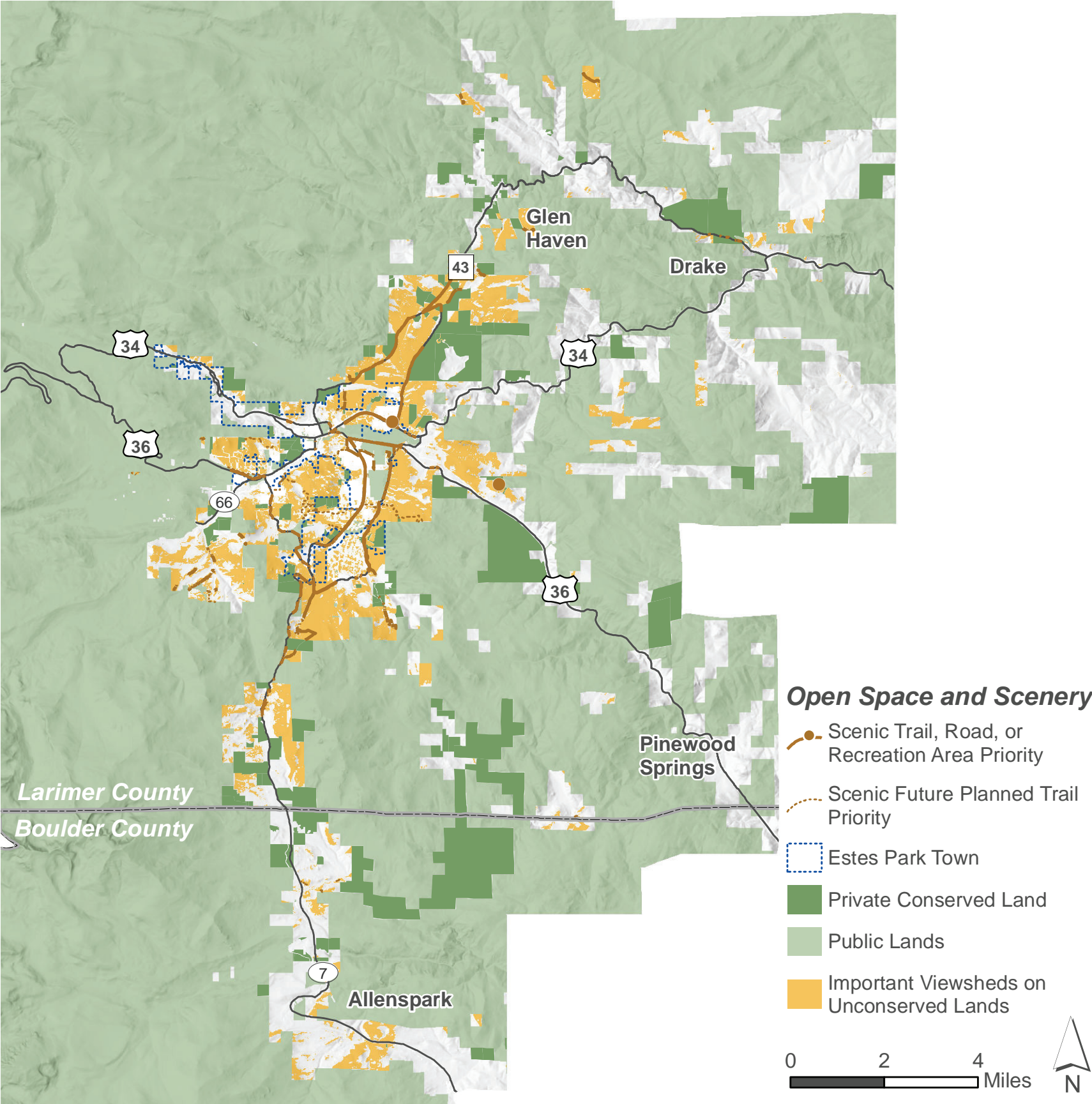


HUGHES FAMILY

Elizabeth Hughes and her family have long ties to the Estes Valley and donated a conservation easement to Estes Valley Land Trust in 1998 to preserve 60 acres along Dry Gulch Road, adjacent to Rocky Mountain National Park. The easement limits development to a 3-acre building envelope that is out of public view, thus helping to keep the north end of the Estes Valley open and picturesque.

Above: Debby Hughes, Elizabeth’s daughter, and Leo Weber are excellent stewards of the Hughes Conservation Easement.

Left: Spectacular views of the north end of the valley and conserved lands along Devil’s Gulch Road.



A SWEEPING LANDSCAPE

We’ve come full circle since Enos Mills, F.O. Stanley, and other tourists sought Estes Park for healing and renewal. Today more than ever, the Estes Valley is associated with health, wellness, and the pleasures of the outdoors. If cascading streams are the lifeblood of the Valley, then scenery is the soul of its people. The map to the left identifies the location of some of the most desirable sight lines and views – for example, from popular trails – based on public input. Important views include those of Longs Peak, Mount Meeker, Lumpy Ridge, Deer Mountain, the Continental Divide, and notable viewpoints from Enos Mills memorial, Lake Estes, downtown Estes Park, and from Dry Gulch Road near MacGregor Ranch.



The total silence of night in the Estes Valley and incredible views of the Milky Way are an experience to behold.

GOAL

Protect the Valley’s stunning mountain scenery.

PRIORITIES

- Protect important views on unconserved lands.
- Protect community gateways along US 36, US 34, and Highway 7.
- Protect key scenic assets, such as Prospect Mountain, Mount Olympus, Mount Pispah, and Oldman Mountain.
- Protect Fall River, the Big Thompson, and the North Fork’s cottonwood and riparian forests.
- Support conservation of scenic quality through governmental development processes, such as ridgeline protections, setbacks from public roads, and design guidelines that help new developments to blend in with the natural environment.
- Implement dark-sky guidelines to avoid unnecessary impacts to the quality of night skies and dark-dependent biological resources.

Outdoor Recreation

Discover the Wild, Connect with Nature

The Estes Valley is a world-renowned destination for outdoor recreation. Estes Valley and Rocky Mountain National Park, with their abundant wildlife, hundreds of miles of trails, and picture-postcard views, attract millions of visitors every year from Colorado’s Front Range and all over the world. It is no surprise that recreational tourism is the largest industry for gateway communities like Estes Park.

While much of the Valley is public land and includes Rocky Mountain National Park, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest, and local parks and open spaces, demand for recreation access continues to rise. Existing outdoor recreation opportunities simply do not meet this demand. Trailhead parking lots are often full by early morning, trails are overcrowded and eroding, campgrounds are full, and reservations are frequently sold out moments after they become available. Human-wildlife conflicts are increasing and unofficial trails created by hikers are causing environmental damage. Additional sustainable outdoor recreation areas are needed to meet the rising demand and reduce impacts on public lands.

Studies have demonstrated that local parks that are safe for children and within easy walking distance for all are essential to the physical, social, and mental development of children and equally important to the health and wellness of adults. Residents of the Valley lead active lifestyles, and their physical and spiritual connection to nature is in large measure why they live here. A 10-minute, or 1/2-mile, walk to a local park is a common indicator of park access and public health. Yet less than one in two Estes Park residents live within a 10-minute walk of a neighborhood park, which is below the national average. The towns of Glen Haven, Drake, Allenspark, and Pinewood Springs are near the national forest; however, with the exception of Allenspark, none of those towns has a neighborhood park.

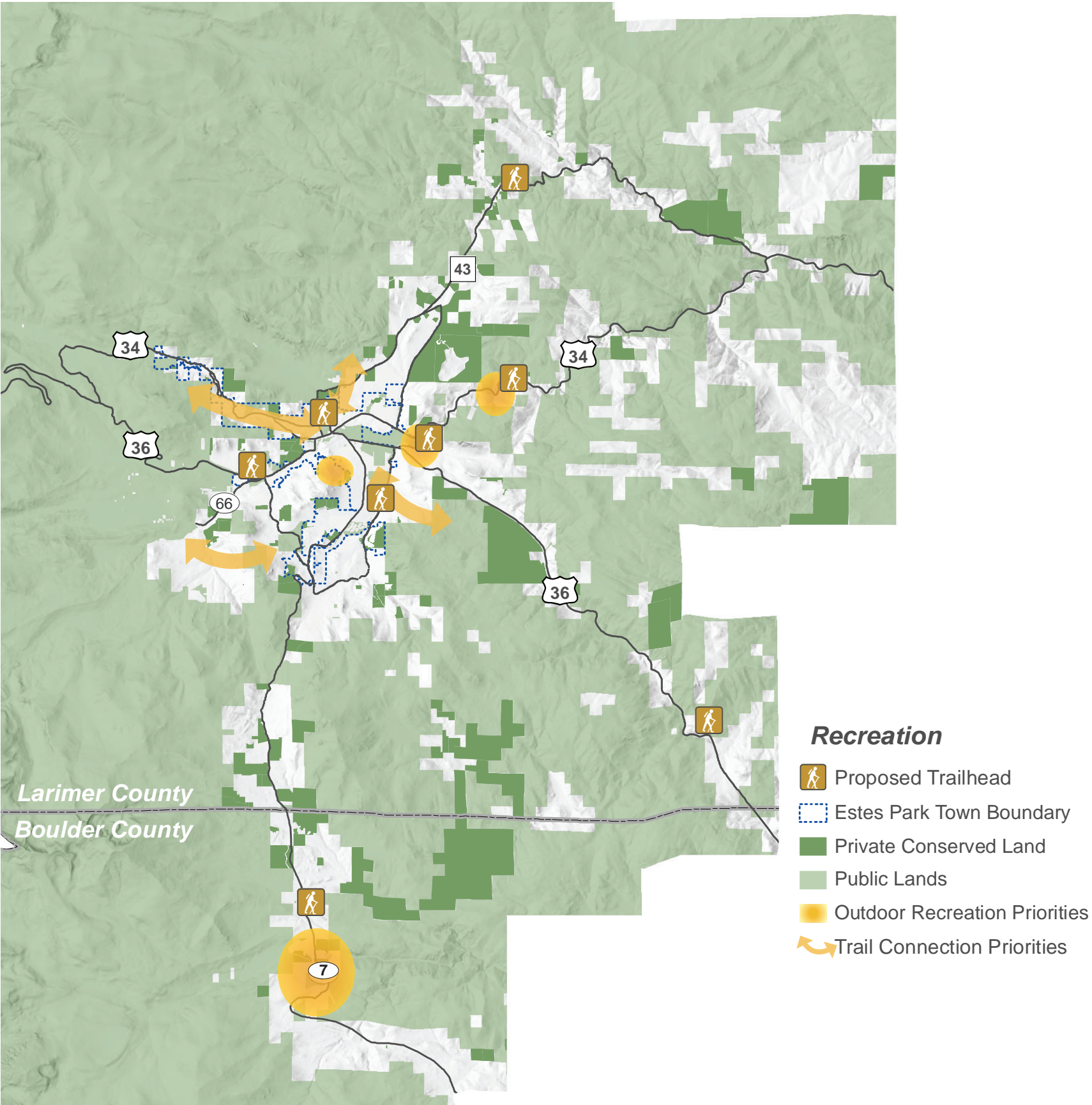


MURDOCK-RIVERA FAMILY

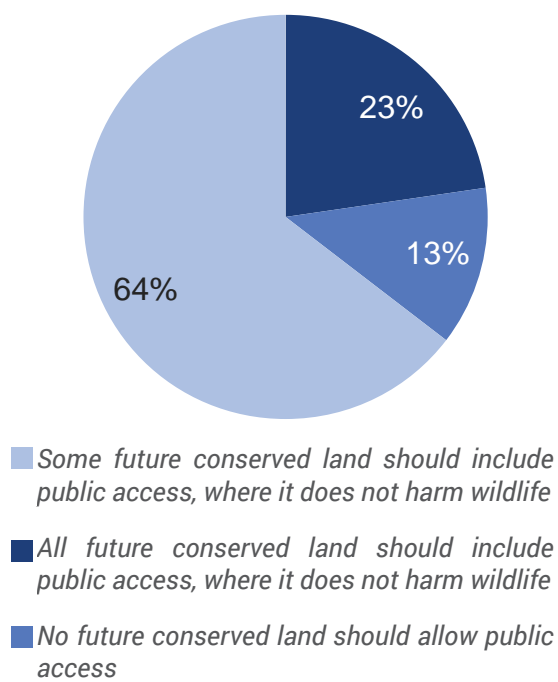
Estee, Erik, and Rose moved to Estes Park in 2016 to help preserve Rocky Mountain National Park and support sustainable access to the outdoors. In their free time, you may find them hiking on the Thumb Open Space, a property under conservation easement with the Estes Valley Land Trust.

Above: Estee, Erik, and Rose hike at the Thumb Open Space.

Left: Mountain bikers enjoy the scenic vistas from the Limber Pine Trail at Hermit Park Open Space, a 1,362-acre public park under conservation easement with the Estes Valley Land Trust. This easement skillfully balances park like features, such as campgrounds and pavilions, with open space preserved for wildlife habitat.



**Desire for Providing Public Access
on Conserved Lands**



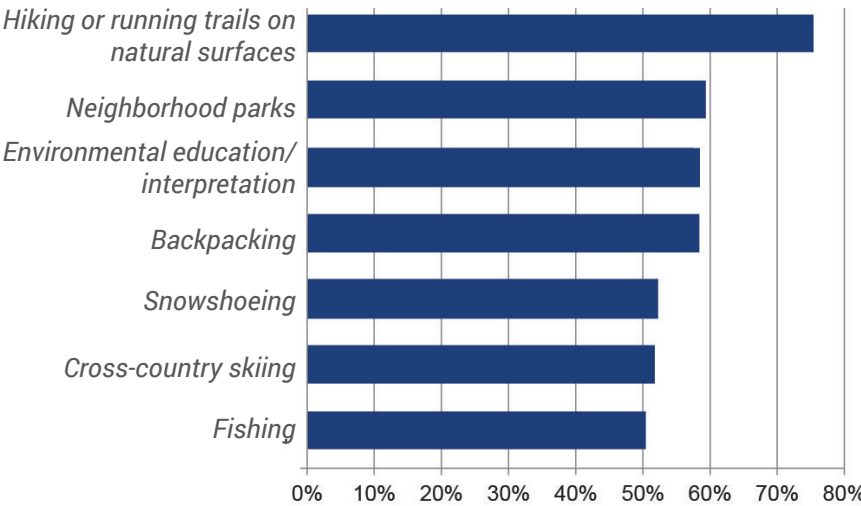
RESPONSIBLE TRAIL RECREATION

Trail-based recreation, specifically for hiking, running, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and environmental education, is by far the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the Estes Valley. Some trails are designated for mountain biking and motorized use. And new trails can't seem to be built fast enough to meet demand.

When located and used sustainably and responsibly, recreational trails can be a way for residents and visitors to experience solitude, serenity, a sense of spirituality, challenge, self-reliance, curiosity, and learning. However, trails can damage the environment if they are not located, designed and maintained properly. They can be a vector for invasive weeds, and their use during critical nesting or calving season can harm wildlife. Community feedback highlighted, at a rate of nearly 90 percent, strong support for more public access as long as it does not harm wildlife.

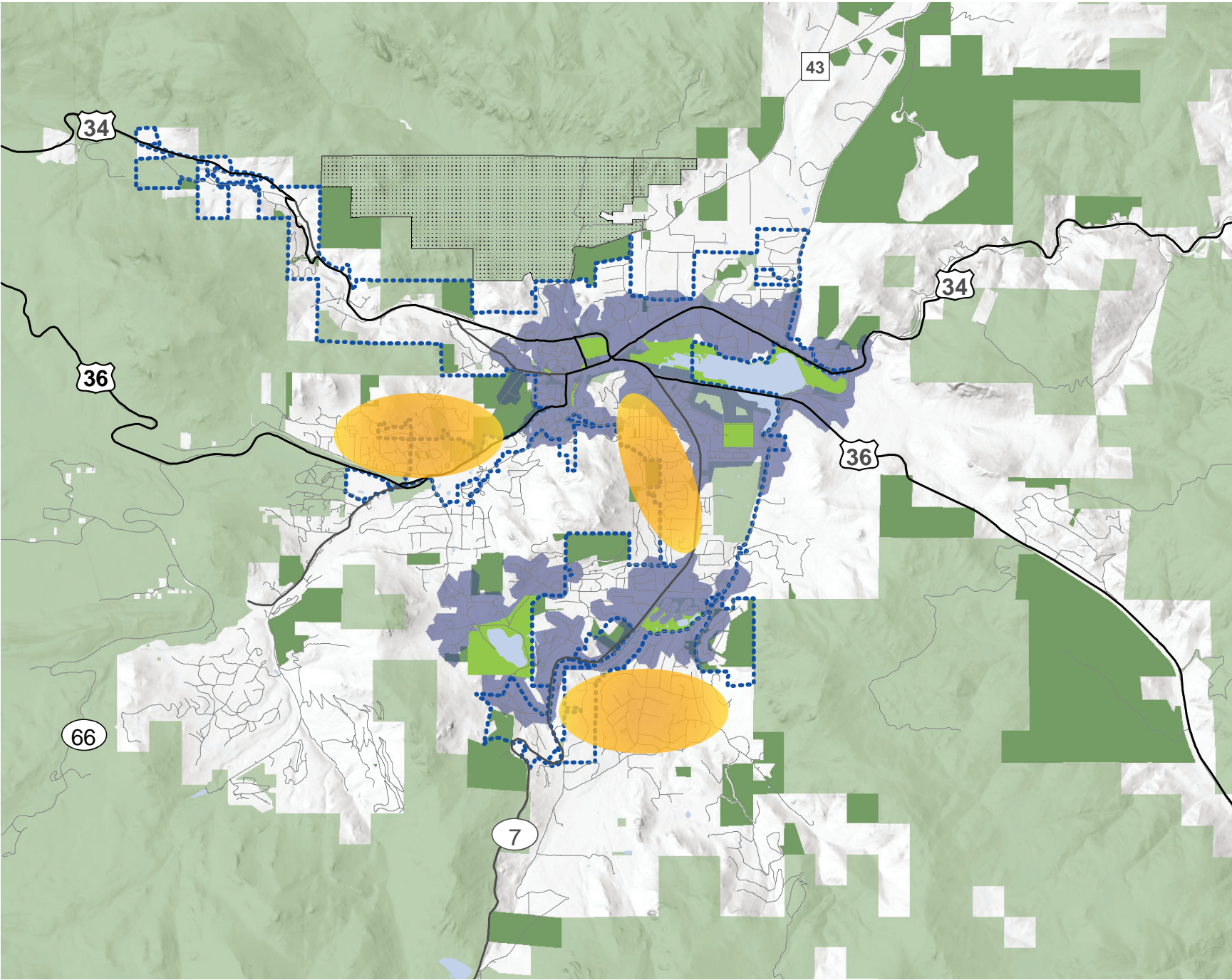
Some residents of the Estes Valley have a longstanding tradition of allowing public access across their private land and Colorado law limits liability to landowners who provide access for no fee. This public access can be lost with a change in ownership or if trail users do not respect private property and posted signs or practice responsible trail etiquette.

Level of Support by Activity Type



Estes Park has been promoting bicycle recreation since the 1960s.

To achieve the vision for an integrated, connected trail system for diverse users, additional trails and trailhead access points are needed. Outdoor recreation priorities, shown in yellow, are the gaps in land conservation needed to provide or connect recreation resources. Critical trail corridors identified include the Fall River corridor, Otie's Trail, connections to Fish Creek, and YMCA/Lily Lake connection. Details of these trail corridors, along with more than 40 other trail recommendations, are highlighted in the Estes Valley Master Trails Plan and will improve multimodal connectivity and soft-surface trail connections throughout the Valley.



Neighborhood Recreation

- Estes Park Town Boundary
- Restricted Public Access
- 1/2- Mile Walk From Local Parks
- Neighborhood Recreation Priorities
- Local Parks
- Private Conserved Land (No Public Access)
- Public Lands



Neighborhood parks, like Bighorn Park in Vail, Colorado, provide opportunities for locals to explore nature's beauty and relax with family and friends close to their homes. Nature play features incorporate the surrounding landscape and vegetation.

NEIGHBORHOOD RECREATION

Recreation areas close to home, such as paved and accessible trails, neighborhood parks, picnicking areas, community gardens, and natural-surface trails with access from neighborhoods within the town, are important to the community. The National Park and other public lands, while abundant, are not always accessible to local families, either due to visitor crowding, distance, time constraints, and/or cost. Further, most public lands do not provide the amenities found at a typical neighborhood park, such as a restroom, shelter, accessible path, or playground.

The rural centers of Glen Haven, Drake, and Pinewood Springs have no neighborhood parks. And despite its name, Estes Park offers few community parks, neighborhoods parks, or pocket parks for its residents. A walkability study of roads and trails from the town’s existing parks was completed to identify neighborhood park deficiencies and trail connection gaps. The results show what many residents already know – many neighborhoods on the western, northeastern, and southern outskirts of town are not served by local parks.

GOAL

Create sustainable recreation access, nurture an adventurous spirit, and encourage environmental stewardship.

PRIORITIES

- Conserve land for new multi-use trail corridors identified in the Estes Valley Trails Master Plan while meeting this Plan’s other priorities.
- Create three new parks in areas of Neighborhood Recreation Priorities, which are identified as having a lack of access.
- Improve neighborhood connectivity to existing parks.
- Create publicly accessible open spaces outside of Estes Park town limits.
- Work with agency and district partners to sustainably manage and maintain future trails and recreation areas.
- Improve public access to Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest near Allenspark, Glen Haven, Pinewood Springs, and in the Big Thompson Canyon.
- Provide additional fishing access on the Big Thompson River near Glen Comfort, as identified in the *A Bigger Vision for the Big T: Recreation and Conservation Plan*.

History and Character

Recognize Our Past, Tell Our Stories

Estes Valley’s varied cultures have been tied closely to natural resources for at least 10,000 years. The Valley has a long history of Ute and Arapaho tribal use and importance, with later influences of fur trapping, prospecting, ranching, and tourism. The Arapaho and Ute enjoyed excellent hunting and fishing while camped in the Valley. To those with a keen eye, Native American artifacts and remnants of sawmills, dams, and game drives are still visible as are those of historic ranger stations and cabins, CCC trails, and early guest ranches.

The first organized expedition to view the Rockies was led by Major Stephen H. Long in 1820. In the mid-1800s settlers such as Joel Estes and ranchers like the MacGregors began working the land, but most pioneering families soon discovered that a more profitable living could be made taking care of the summer visitors who arrived in ever-increasing numbers to recreate and rest among scenery that many described as rivaling Switzerland itself. As hunting and fishing decimated the wildlife population and timber harvesting increased, Enos Mills, the Colorado Mountain Club, the Estes Park Improvement and Protective Association, and others set their sights on preserving 1,000 square miles that stretched from Wyoming to Pikes Peak. Their advocacy was rewarded when in 1915 Rocky Mountain National Park was established.

F.O. Stanley’s stately hotel stands prominently over a century later, and the MacGregor Ranch continues to run cattle to this day. Maintaining these icons enriches our cultural memory. Many other notable hotels, buildings and artifacts have come and gone – especially those originally constructed within Rocky Mountain National Park – reminding us that significant natural landmarks long outlast our built environment and will continue to influence the community’s character for future generations.



TOWN OF ESTES PARK

The Stanley Hotel is one of the most iconic historic hotels in the US and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Town of Estes Park donated conservation easements on foreground parcels around the Stanley to ensure the public will forever have unimpaired views of the colonial revival hotel.

Above: Town of Estes Park Administrator Travis Machalek admires the historic Stanley Hotel.

Left: The Stanley Hotel was built by Freelan Oscar Stanley of Stanley Steamer fame and opened on July 4, 1909.

HISTORIC SITES

The National Register of Historic Places lists a number of significant historic sites and districts within the Estes Valley. Many, from the late 1800s and early 1900s, are camps, homes, hotels, and roads associated with homesteaders, recreational travel, and the early years of the National Park. Others include more modern infrastructure, such as the Colorado-Big Thompson water project, and other water and energy projects. Dozens of other significant cultural properties are eligible for the National Register but have not yet been formally listed.

9 Cultural Districts *(geographically definable areas with a significant concentration of sites united by a past event over 50 years ago) including:*

- Moraine Park
- Elkhorn Lodge
- Stanley Hotel District
- MacGregor Ranch
- Hewes-Kirkwood Inn

1 Cultural Object *(a manmade object over 50 years in age):*

- Snogo Snow Plow

24 Historic Buildings *(a structure built over 50 years ago and suitable for human occupation) including:*

- Enos Mills Homestead Cabin
- Bunce School
- Fall River Pass Ranger Station
- Twin Sisters Lookout
- The Craggs Lodge
- Edgemont



CHEYENNE & ARAPAHO TRIBES

“We have legends of this place. A place we go to gather medicines, to worship Our Father and to survive the winters.

When you begin to think of what to preserve, think of the beauty of the land, keep as much as possible in its natural state, keep the water clear and let the natural habitat remain for it is part of our survival.

When the Arapaho come, they will be coming home, they will feel the attachment to this land, they will be happy to have returned as the old ones live through us. Wohei.”

- Fred Mosqueda, Sr. Arapaho Coordinator

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

A cultural landscape is a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources, that is associated with a historic event, activity or person, or exhibiting any other cultural or aesthetic values. When preserving cultural landscapes, it is necessary to include their significant physical attributes, biological systems, and uses that contributed to their historical significance.

Indigenous cultural landscapes demonstrate aspects of the natural and cultural resources that supported Native Americans’ lives and settlements. The natural world’s landforms, water, wildlife and plants were used for more than subsistence – they anchored the Native Americans’ history, medicines, oral traditions, and spirituality. Some Native languages give names to natural locations in such a way that the history of the place is passed down. Today, the entirety of the natural environment is important physically and spiritually.

For example, current day Rocky Mountain National Park was once the hunting grounds of the Arapaho and a potential reservation location. A first hand account of an important 1914 Arapaho naming expedition with two Arapaho elders passes on native names for important trails, travel routes, battles, events, camps and Arapaho stories about area.

The Tribes, museums, historic preservation groups, and this project’s partners pursue a common goal: to share the legends, stories, customs, and natural landscape with present and future generations.

GOAL

Preserve our cultural landscapes and historic structures to deepen our connection to the land and to those who were here before us.

PRIORITIES

- Preserve cultural landscapes, such as Oldman Mountain.
- Preserve lands listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register as well as eligible historic sites.
- Work with partners to inventory, interpret, and manage historic structures.
- Continue interaction with Ute, Arapaho, and other tribal communities to understand protection and use of ethnographic resources and traditional cultural properties.
- Embrace various ways people have used this land over time, including recreational tourism such as mountain climbing and camping.

Sustainable Town and Rural Center Areas

Grow Sustainably

One hundred years ago the campaign to establish Rocky Mountain National Park pitted conservation against commercial interests, who argued that such a designation would condemn private lands and hinder tourism. While there may still be tensions between conservation and development today, the economic development interests in the Estes Valley recognize that nature is the golden goose and that protecting the environment is in everyone’s best interest, residents and visitors alike.

Likewise, conservation advocates recognize that we all depend on a healthy economy and that our quality of life is tied to vibrant town centers and a strong job market. Housing for the Valley’s workforce has become unaffordable, and towns and businesses struggle to retain the teachers, police officers, grocery store clerks, and others that serve us all.

This Plan recognizes that we need to balance conservation and development and that we all benefit from a healthy environment and economy. Growth is inevitable, but it can occur in a fashion that protects the environment and our quality of life, while still providing housing for all. This is called “sustainable growth.”

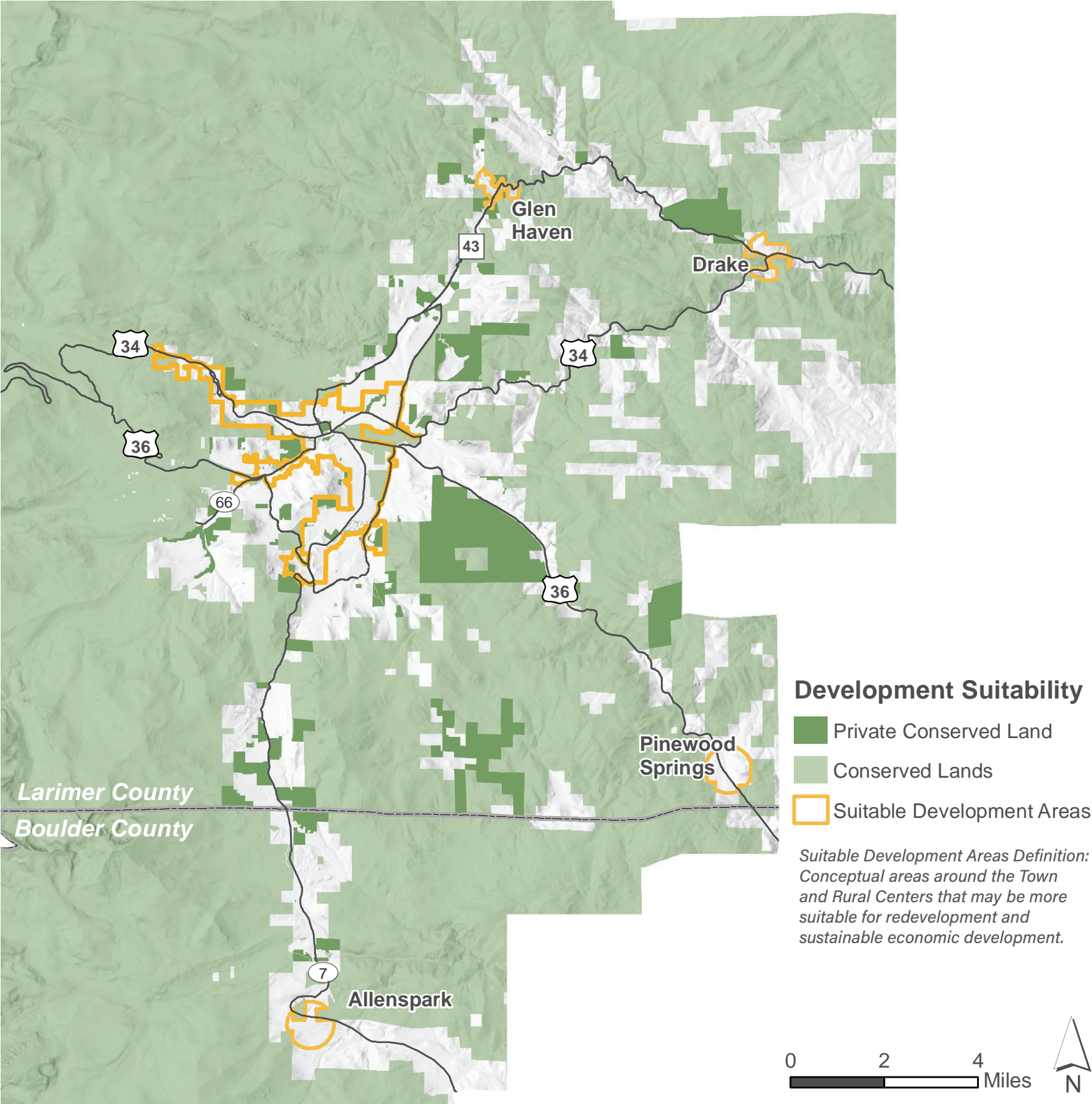


ESTES PARK HOUSING AUTHORITY

Estes Park is a wonderful place to visit, although living and working here can bring challenges to those looking for affordable housing. The Housing Authority is committed to serving the community’s housing needs. Our workforce not only serves the many visitors to the community, it also supports a diverse and stable economy. The Housing Authority works with Estes Valley Land Trust as well as other partners to create housing opportunities that protect both the environment and the economy of our community.

Above: Housing Authority Executive Director Naomi Hawf stands in front of Falcon Ridge, an affordable apartment and townhome community in Estes Park.

Left: Charming downtown Estes Park buzzes with activity on a summer day.



RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

The three options available – growing up, growing out, or not growing at all – lead many to emphasize compact growth and better use of land in our towns. Both Larimer and Boulder counties’ Comprehensive Plans support a clustered, village pattern of tourist/commercial/civic nodes in Rural Centers to serve the daily needs of the unincorporated community. Responsible development should be focused in places that are:

- Outside of the conservation priorities identified in this Plan.
- Within or adjacent to the Estes Park town limits or Rural Centers (Pinewood Springs, Allenspark, Drake, and Glen Haven).
- Within 1/2 mile of major roads.
- Serviceable by urban infrastructure, such as sewer, water, and emergency services.
- Set back from waterways and ridgelines.
- On slopes less than 15 percent.
- Resilient to flooding, wildfires, rockfalls, landslides, and avalanches.
- Consistent with locations shown on the counties’ and towns’ Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Maps.

GOAL

Promote sustainable, stable economic development in areas that are not conservation priorities or hazardous areas.

PRIORITIES

- Concentrate commercial and housing development towards Town and Rural Centers.
- Encourage redevelopment of existing buildings and houses as well as development on vacant and under-used lots in downtown Estes Park and along state highways within Town and Rural Center limits.
- Locate development to avoid natural hazards and impacts to distinctive and/or sensitive natural, cultural, and scenic features, and to protect water quality.
- Ensure a range of higher-density housing types to meet the housing needs of young families, the local workforce, and aging citizens.
- Explore and work with partners to implement incentives, such as transfer of development rights programs, to promote open space protection while allowing for increased density.
- Develop new financial incentives to facilitate conservation and sustainable development.

AN UNTAPPED TOOL

Among several others, one market strategy that has not been tapped in the Estes Valley is transferable development rights (sometimes referred to as purchase of development rights). This incentive method allows development rights of land with conservation value (“sending areas”) to be purchased by developers and transferred to “receiving areas” planned to accommodate growth and development. Through the transfer, conservation values are protected through a deed restriction or conservation easement. Targeted receiving and sending areas are decided upon through an open, deliberative process using a community’s Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code.

Transferable development rights programs have been used successfully in Larimer and Boulder counties and throughout Colorado for decades to protect environmental resources, historic areas, and areas susceptible to natural hazards. To truly be used successfully, developers must realize the extra value (profit) beyond the cost of the development rights, and landowners in sending areas must feel adequately compensated for giving up the right to develop. Development rights transferred to receiving areas can potentially diversify housing stock, upgrade infrastructure, and make housing more affordable.

In Closing

What will the future of open space and outdoor recreation in the Estes Valley look like? Can we continue to grow the Valley’s economy while at the same time conserve our beautiful scenery, providing housing for all, and preserving our quality of life?

By working together, in the next 10 years we could:

- conserve another **5,000 acres**
- build **20 miles of trails**; and
- create **new tools and partnerships** that preserve:
 - Healthier wildlife, habitat, and ecosystems
 - Beautiful views of our iconic landscape
 - Sustainable outdoor recreation for all
 - Historic resources that tell our story
 - Sustainable growth that strengthens our economy

A CALL TO ACTION

We, the Estes Valley Land Trust and our partners, invite you to:

- *enjoy the outdoors and marvel in the beauty of the Estes Valley*
- *support conservation efforts that protect the Valley*
- *support sustainable development that protects the environment, serves our community, and grows the economy*
- *become a member of the Estes Valley Land Trust*
- *donate a conservation easement*
- *volunteer with a partner*

Learn more at: evlandtrust.org



