



# ESTES VALLEY **OPEN SPACE PLAN**

A Shared Land Conservation Strategy





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## 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

The Estes Valley has a rich history. Prehistoric Native Americans were drawn to the Valley and surrounding mountains and hunting blinds made of stone 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?

The Estes Valley Land Trust developed this Plan, along with our partners, to be more strategic and create shared land conservation priorities. By working together, we can preserve another 5,000 acres of land in the next decade and protect what makes the Estes Valley special.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Boring  
Executive Director  
Estes Valley Land Trust  
December 2020

*A strategic approach to land  
conservation will help preserve the  
most critical wildlife habitat.*



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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

The Estes Valley Land Trust and our partners seek to protect the open spaces that define the Estes and Tahosa valleys. We work to conserve critical wildlife habitat, historic lands, and our scenic and recreational heritage and to support the mutual success of viable ranching, healthy watersheds, and a sustainable economy.

The Open Space Plan creates a unified vision for the Estes and Tahosa valleys that recognizes the importance of protecting this special place. The Plan also creates a strategic approach and a set of implementation actions to help ensure this vision becomes a reality.

## OUR VISION FOR THE VALLEY

We realize that residents and visitors are a part of (not apart from) our shared natural environment and that our land-use decisions can either harm the environment or better protect it. Therefore, our vision recognizes the role humans play in our environment and contemplates a future where we come together to preserve land.

**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 and cooperate to preserve nature, and residents who live active lifestyles and support a strong and diverse economy.**

## ABOUT THE ESTES VALLEY LAND TRUST

The Estes Valley Land Trust was formed in 1987 by seven local residents. Their call to action was straightforward: to preserve land.

For more than three decades, the Estes Valley Land Trust has worked with private landowners, local governments, the business community, and countless volunteers to preserve nearly 10,000 acres of land. Our mission remains constant:

**To conserve land throughout the Estes Valley and surrounding areas for current and future generations.**

*A small development footprint, like the campus of Eagle Rock School, protects intact forests. Conservation easements are a great tool to provide limited development and preserve land.*



# 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 town of Estes Park and portions of unincorporated Larimer and Boulder counties, including, but not limited to, Drake, Glen Haven, Pinewood Springs, and Allenspark. However, since much of the Estes Valley is already conserved within Rocky Mountain National Park and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest, 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 within the North Fork Big Thompson, Big Thompson, and Tahosa Valley. It hosts abundant populations of large mammals and birds such as elk, deer and raptors, and uncommon and elusive wildlife such as the tiger salamander, greenback cutthroat trout and painted lady (a butterfly). The Valley also supports a vibrant outdoor recreation economy and charming mountain communities. The landscape and sky offer many natural wonders – birds returning from migration 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

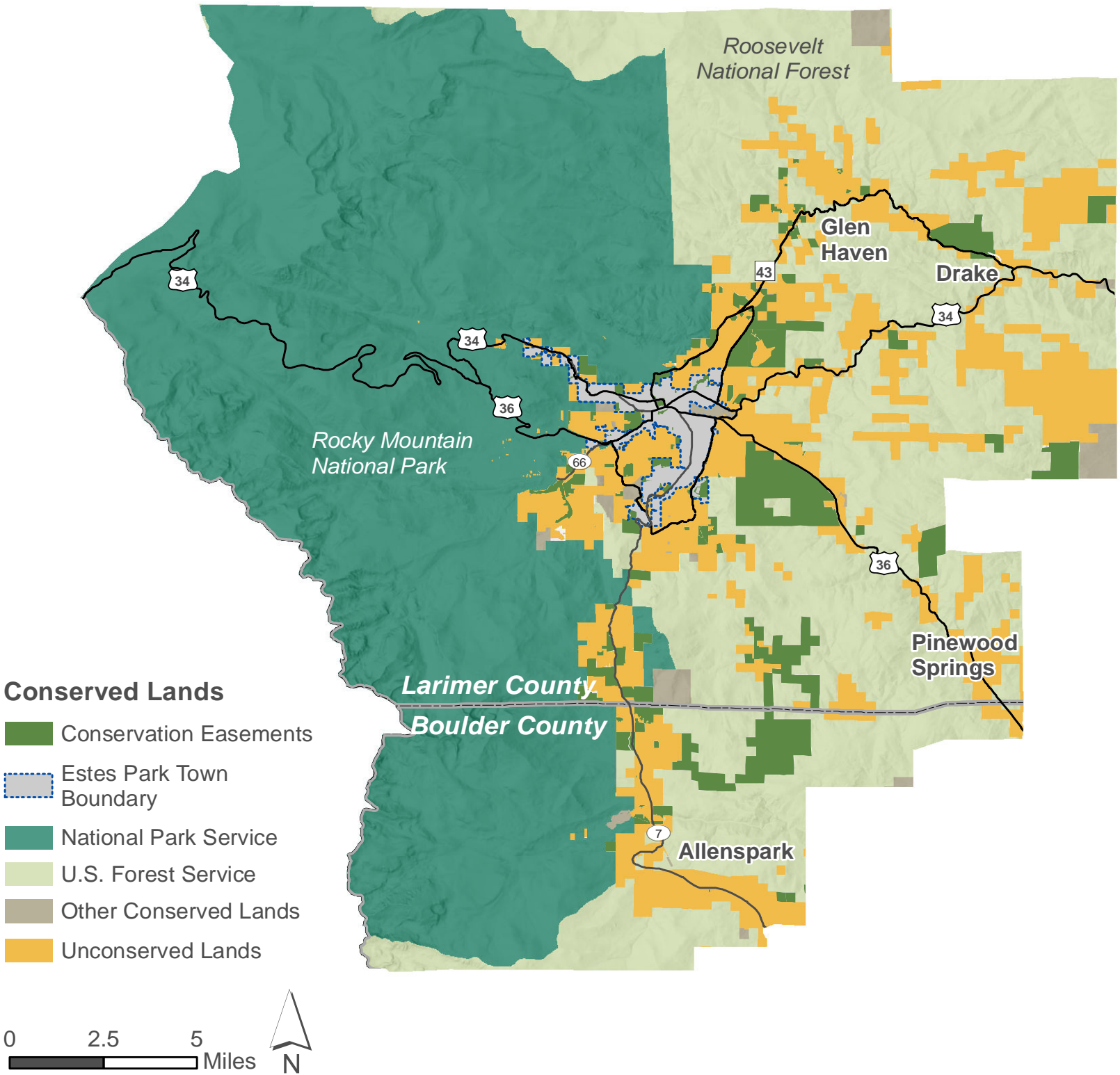
29% Jobs in lodging and  
food services

Estes Housing Needs Assessment 2016

\$16.3 Million

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. Identifying land conservation priorities can help direct future development away from these environmentally sensitive 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 creates a variety of threats to the natural environment, such as reducing snow cover and the availability of water, prolonging drier conditions more conducive to invasive weeds, pests and catastrophic 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?

Being outside connects people to nature and helps build and sustain an environmental ethic. Individuals are more likely to support land conservation if they feel connected to the landscape that is threatened. Outdoor recreation is also good for us; it helps reduce blood pressure and builds muscle, and reduces stress and anxiety. For many in Colorado, outdoor recreation is a way of life, a part of their personal, family, and community identity. Sustainable outdoor recreation includes the practice of leave no trace principles and involves designing and maintaining trails in a manner that does not damage wildlife or the environment.





# Conservation Priorities

## HOW WE DEVELOPED OUR PRIORITIES

Estes Valley Land Trust staff and select Board members formed a steering committee with other conservation organizations, public agencies, recreationists, the business community, and other community members in the Valley to develop this plan. Land Trust partners share the goals of conserving land that reflects our community’s values, as well as providing inclusive and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities, and supporting a strong regional economy that does not harm the natural environment.

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, Town of Estes Park, and Larimer County. The land preserved within the Reserve neighborhood was originally donated to the land trust by a developer, before the land was encumbered with a conservation easement. An “all hands on deck” approach to land conservation creates new opportunities to protect more open space and recognizes that we can achieve more by working together and creating shared conservation priorities.

We also gathered input on these conservation priorities from the community via a survey and through conversations with stakeholders. Over four hundred surveys were completed by Valley residents and a strong interest for more land conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation was evident. In addition, over 150 comments were received during the Draft Plan’s public comment period, before the Plan was finalized. Maps in this Plan identify where land conservation and new outdoor recreation is desired.



# 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. The Valley 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 alter the Valley’s wildlife habitat and forest structure resulting in an extended fire season with potentially more frequent and catastrophic fires.



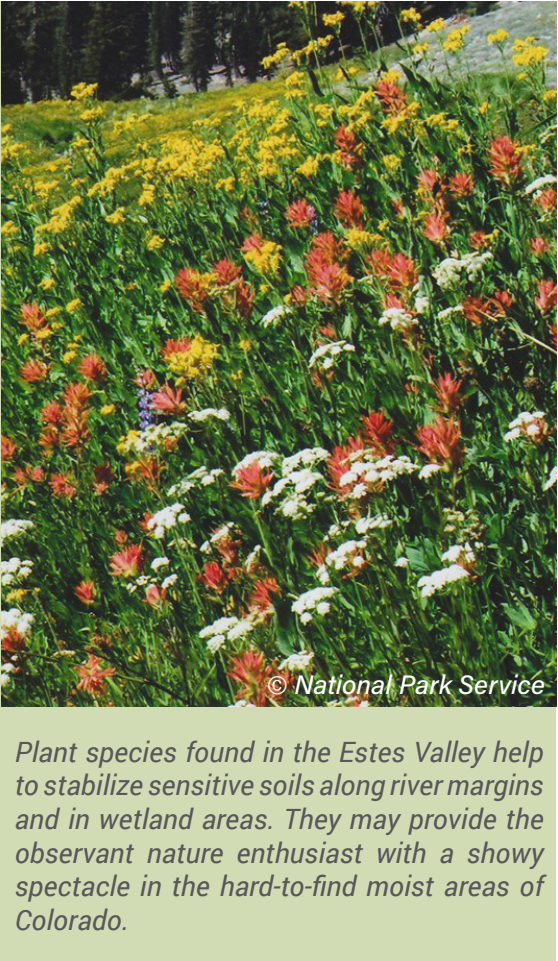
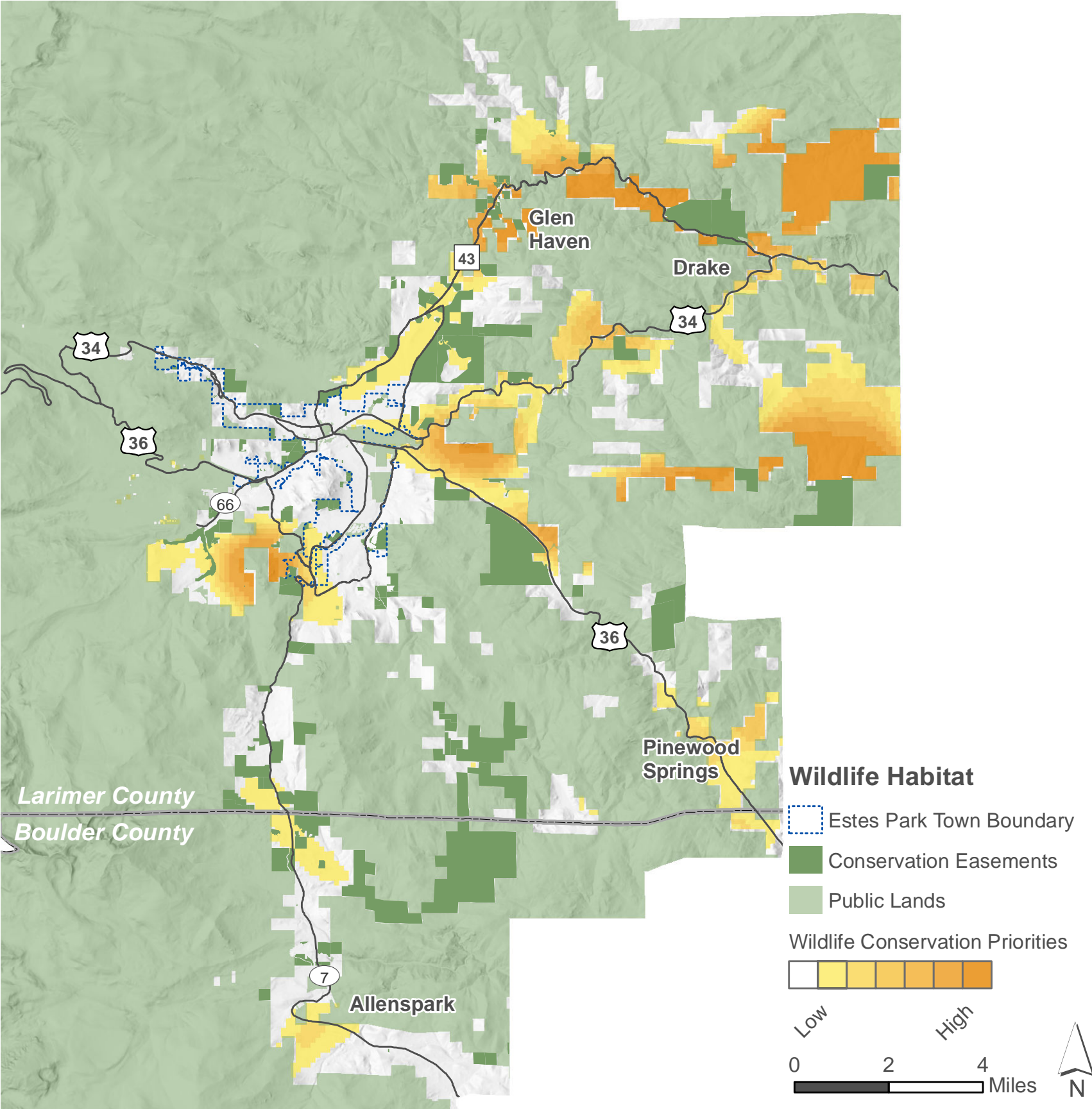
### PIET AND HELEN HONDIUS

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, Piet and Helen 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 had rebounded to an estimated 7,040 bighorn sheep.*





## PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity in the broadest sense refers to the variety of living organisms, their habitats and the biological processes they depend on. Ecosystems that are biodiverse are generally healthier and more resilient after major disturbances, such as a fire. To maintain its rich biodiversity, Colorado’s forests and other plant communities require adaptive management, such as controlling invasive exotic plants, improving forest health and reintroducing threatened or endangered species or biological processes, such as periodic flooding.

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

Protecting large habitat blocks and wildlife corridors reduces habitat loss and fragmentation and protects biodiversity.

## GOAL

Protect large habitat blocks, 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, and Fall rivers, St. Vrain creeks, 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 and Mount Meeker, along with the other 10 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 is 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 was Colorado’s first 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 are highly visible. Protecting scenery brings “blanket benefits” of protecting watersheds, wildlife habitat, 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 brings joy to millions of people every year.



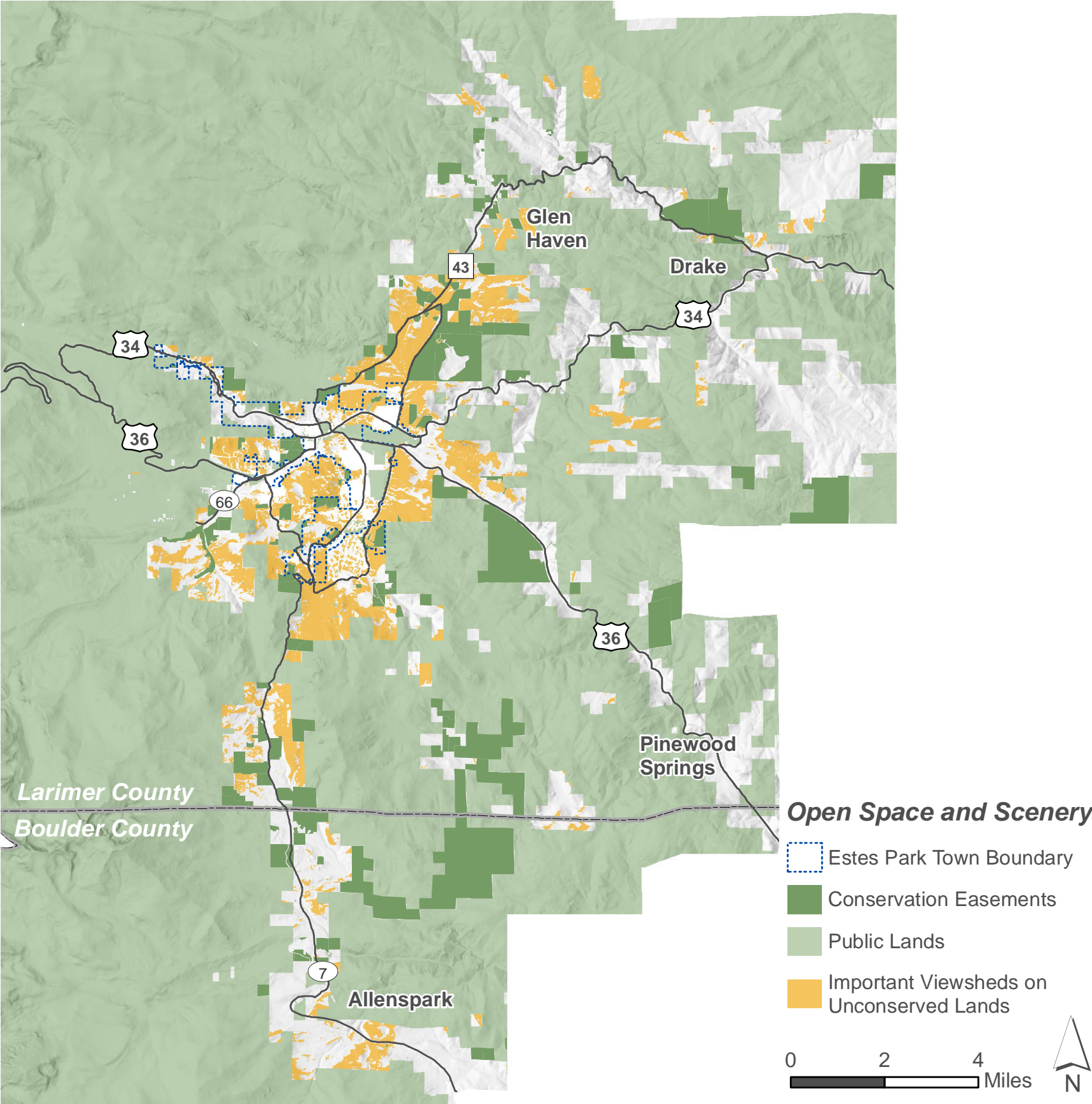
### HUGHES FAMILY

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.

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 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 Pisgah, and Oldman Mountain.
- Protect the riparian forests of Fall River, the Big Thompson River, and the North Fork.
- Support conservation of scenic quality through governmental development processes, such as ridgeline protections, setbacks from public roads, and design guidelines that help new developments 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 have 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 half of 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.



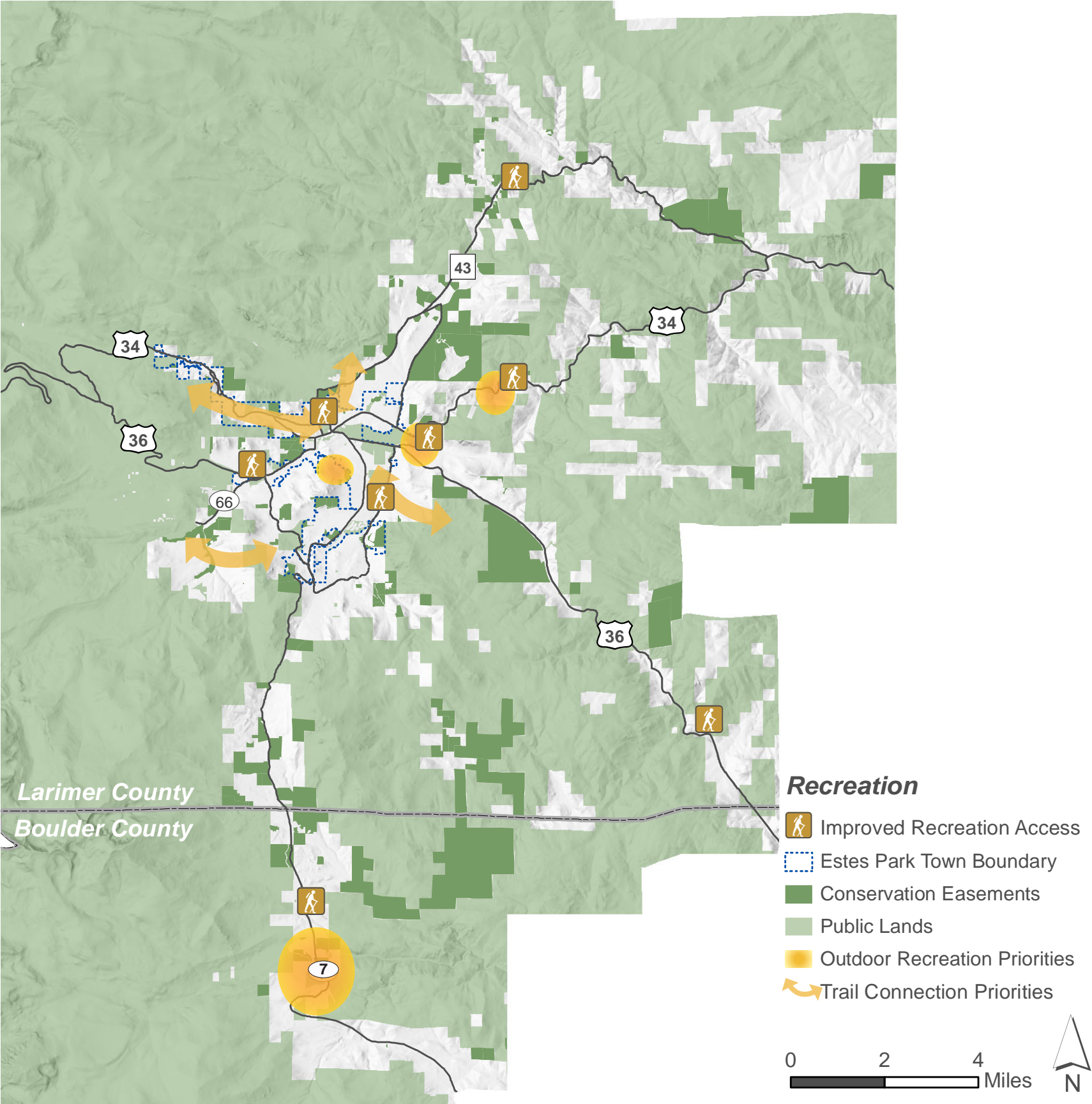
### MURDOCK-RIVERA FAMILY

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.

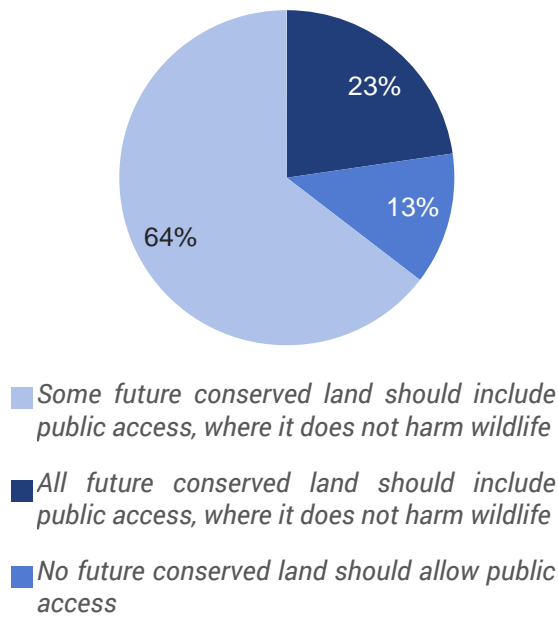
Above: Estee, Erik, and Rose hike at the Thumb Open Space.

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

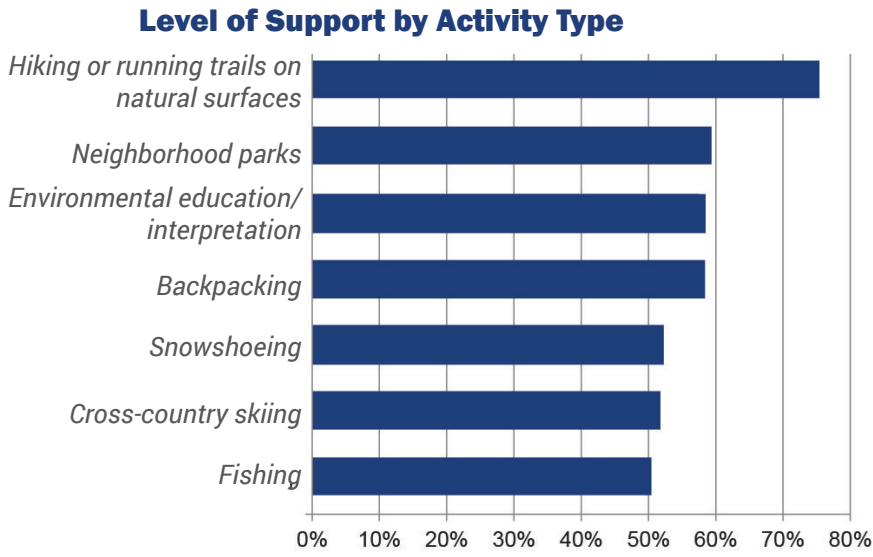
Trail-based recreation, specifically for hiking, running, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and environmental education, is by far the most popular outdoor recreation activity in the Estes Valley. Some trails are designated for mountain biking and motorized use. And new trails can't seem to be built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

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. Assessing the impacts to wildlife before a trail is built, building it in the proper location, closing the trail as needed, and practicing "leave no trace principles" are important management actions to protect the environment.

Future trails envisioned in this plan would be built on public lands, unless a private landowner wishes to provide public access and access can be provided in a manner that does not impact wildlife.

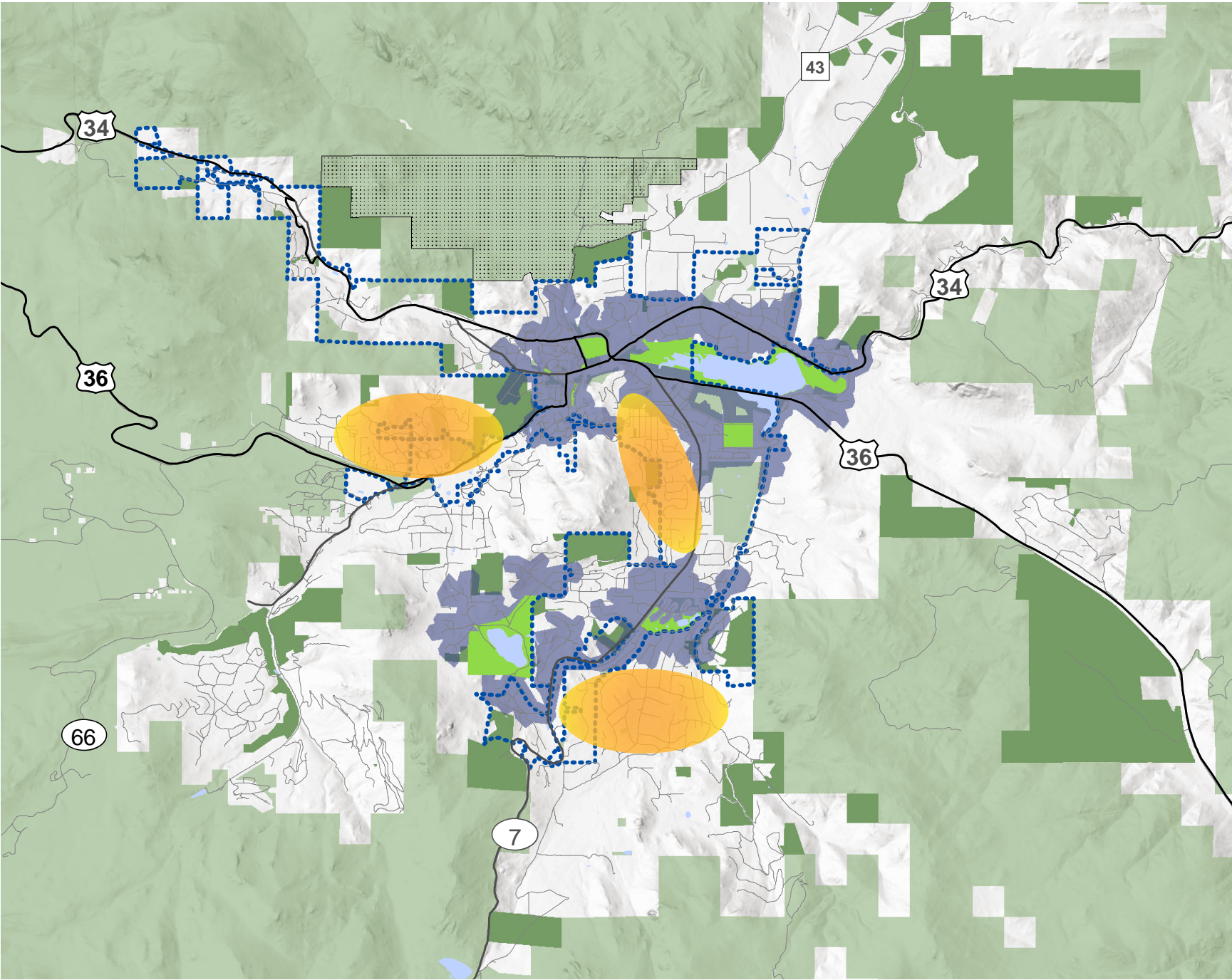
Some residents of the Estes Valley have a longstanding tradition of allowing public access and Colorado law limits liability to landowners who provide access for no fee. This public access can be lost with a change in ownership if trail users do not respect private property or practice responsible trail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



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.

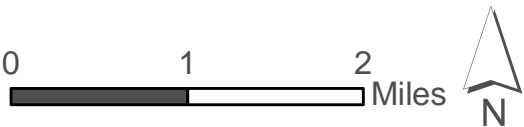
Details of these trail corridors, along with more than 40 other trail recommendations, are highlighted in the Estes Valley Master Trails Plan, as completed by Estes Valley Recreation and Parks District and partners, and would improve multimodal connectivity and soft-surface trail connections throughout the Valley.





**Neighborhood Recreation**

- Estes Park Town Boundary
- Restricted Public Access
- 1/2-Mile Walk From Local Parks
- Neighborhood Recreation Priorities
- Local Parks
- Conservation Easements (with 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 and Drake have no neighborhood parks. And despite its name, Estes Park offers few community parks, neighborhood 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 edges 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, & UTE 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.

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.
- Work with Ute, Arapaho, and other Sovereign Nations to interpret and protect cultural landscapes.
- 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.”



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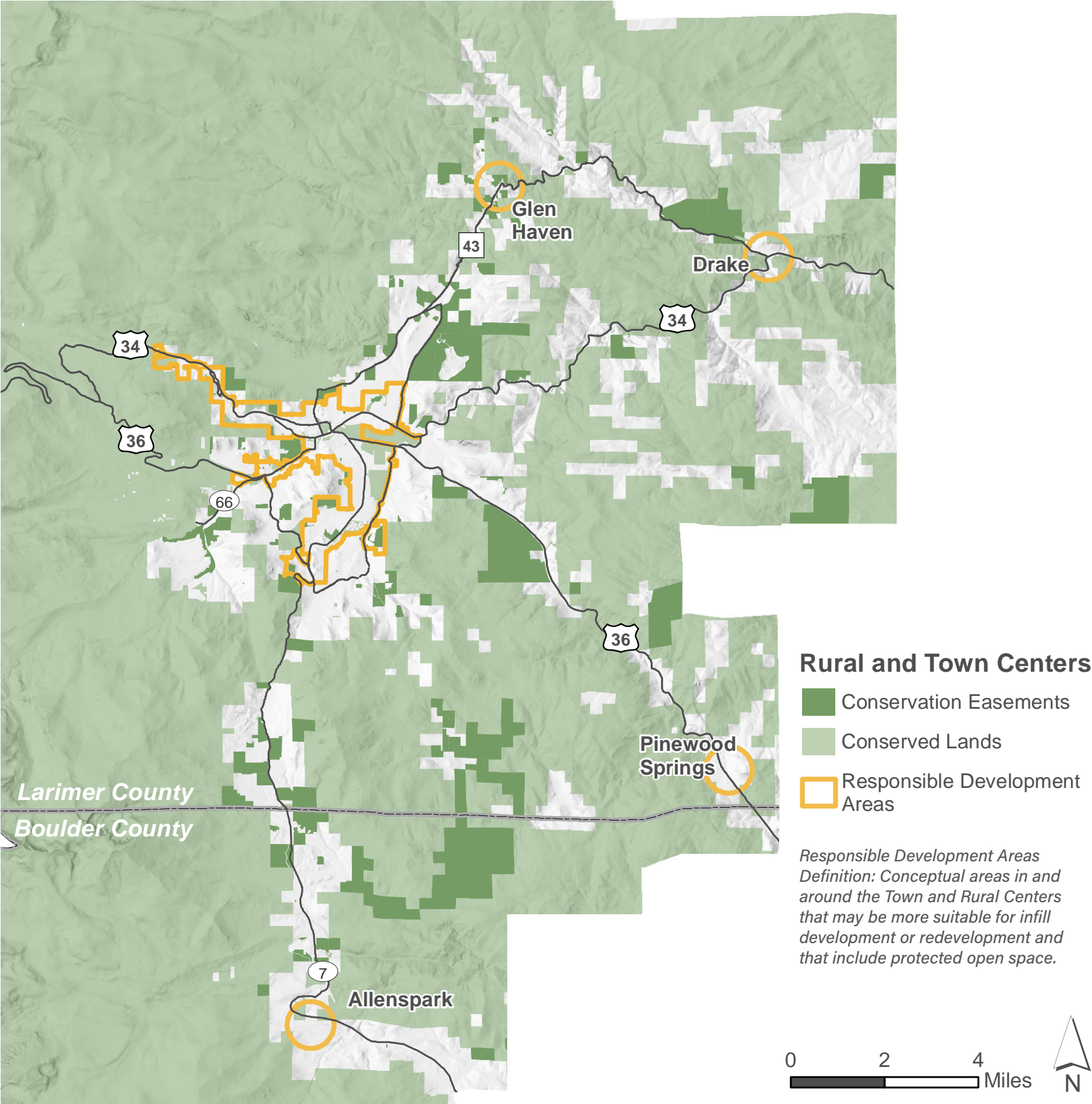
## ESTES PARK HOUSING AUTHORITY

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

- Locate commercial and housing development towards Town and Rural Centers.
- Encourage redevelopment of under-utilized 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 housing types to meet the 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 conserving 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 sustainable trails on public lands**; 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

## IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

The following strategic actions are needed to stimulate land conservation in the Estes Valley and help protect the quality of life we all share:

- 1. Adopt the plan at local levels.** Endorsement of the Estes Valley Open Space Plan by local governments, special districts, and partnering organizations will build partnerships and create support for the Plan.
- 2. Integrate this plan’s principles into regional and state open space and outdoor recreation plans.** Open space and outdoor recreation planning occurs at the county, regional and state level by Boulder and Larimer County, the USFS, Great Outdoors Colorado, and others. Integrating the Estes Valley Open Space Plan into these regional and state efforts will help provide funding to implement this plan.
- 3. Identify parcel-level conservation and outdoor recreation priorities with the Town of Estes Park and Larimer and Boulder counties.** Specific areas of the Estes Valley will be identified for potential private land conservation (no public access), public open space (limited public access), and parks.
- 4. Provide funding to enable additional land conservation.** The Estes Valley Land Trust will fundraise and work with Larimer and Boulder counties, the Town of Estes Park, Great Outdoors Colorado and others to reduce conservation easement transaction costs and purchase development rights or land.





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