

BLODGETT OPEN SPACE MASTER AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

City Council Appeal Hearing
June 10, 2024

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Director, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services

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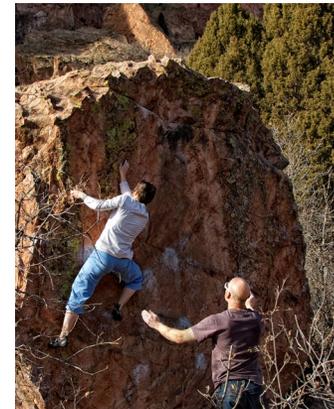
David Deitemeyer
TOPS Senior Program Administrator



COLORADO SPRINGS' PARKS



- ❑ Colorado Springs offers incredible parks, recreation and cultural service opportunities
- ❑ Essential for promoting physical activity, social interaction, and overall well-being
- ❑ Our parks system also enhances the quality of life for our residents by generating local jobs and business opportunities, making a significant impact on the Colorado Springs economy.



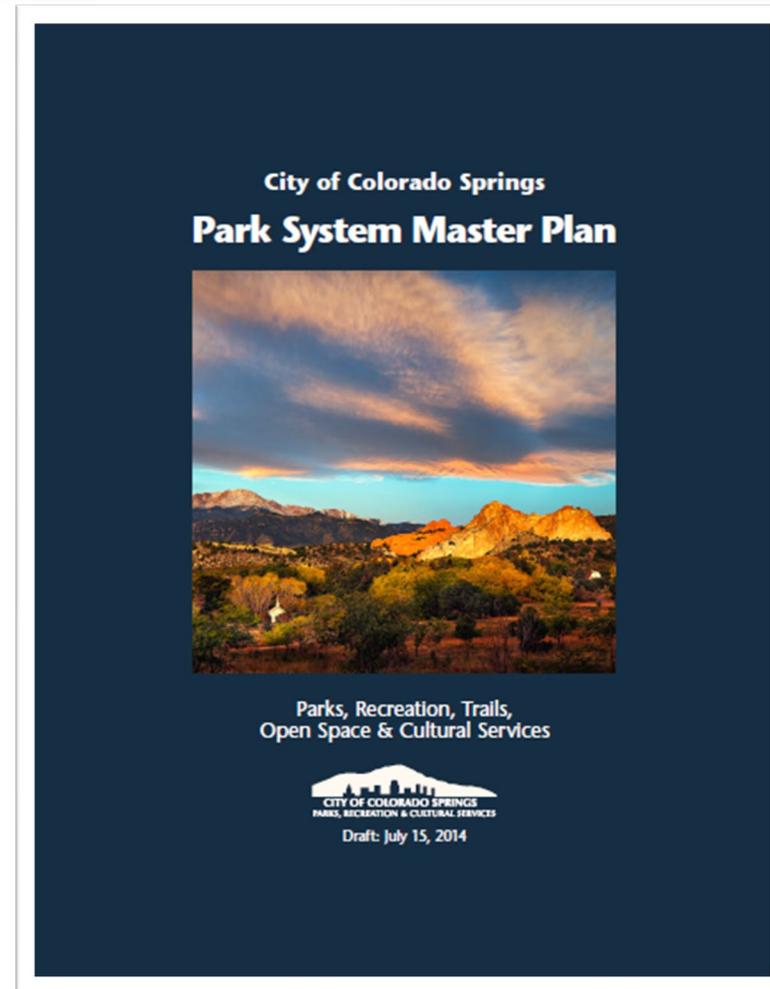
COLORADO SPRINGS PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN



2014 Park system master plan guides the community vision of our Parks, Trails and Open Spaces

Open space – parcel of land set aside to retain land, water, vegetation, historic, cultural, and aesthetic features in their natural or primarily natural state.

These areas provide wildlife habitat, help share healthy growth, maintain scenic vistas, and provide recreational opportunities for the community.



REVIEW CRITERIA

- ❑ Guided by the Parks System Master Plan, we are responsible to be **good stewards** of the resources, **manage and enhance** public park lands, and **serve** the community

- ❑ Parks System Master Plan (p161)
 - ❑ Develop Master Plans for all open space properties
 - ❑ Develop Management strategies
 - ❑ Balance recreation and natural resource protection
 - ❑ Provide sustainable and appropriate access

- ❑ City Code Chapter 4
 - ❑ TOPS Ordinance (4.6.101)
 - ❑ Public access and preservation

MASTER PLAN THEMES

The Master Plan recommendations reflect community values captured from the public engagement process, evaluation of current operations, analysis of existing facilities and policies, and consideration of trends. These recommendations have been organized under seven core themes, which guide the future parks, recreation, trails and cultural services actions and decision-making for the next 10 years.

The Park System Master Plan recommendations are organized around **7** key themes:

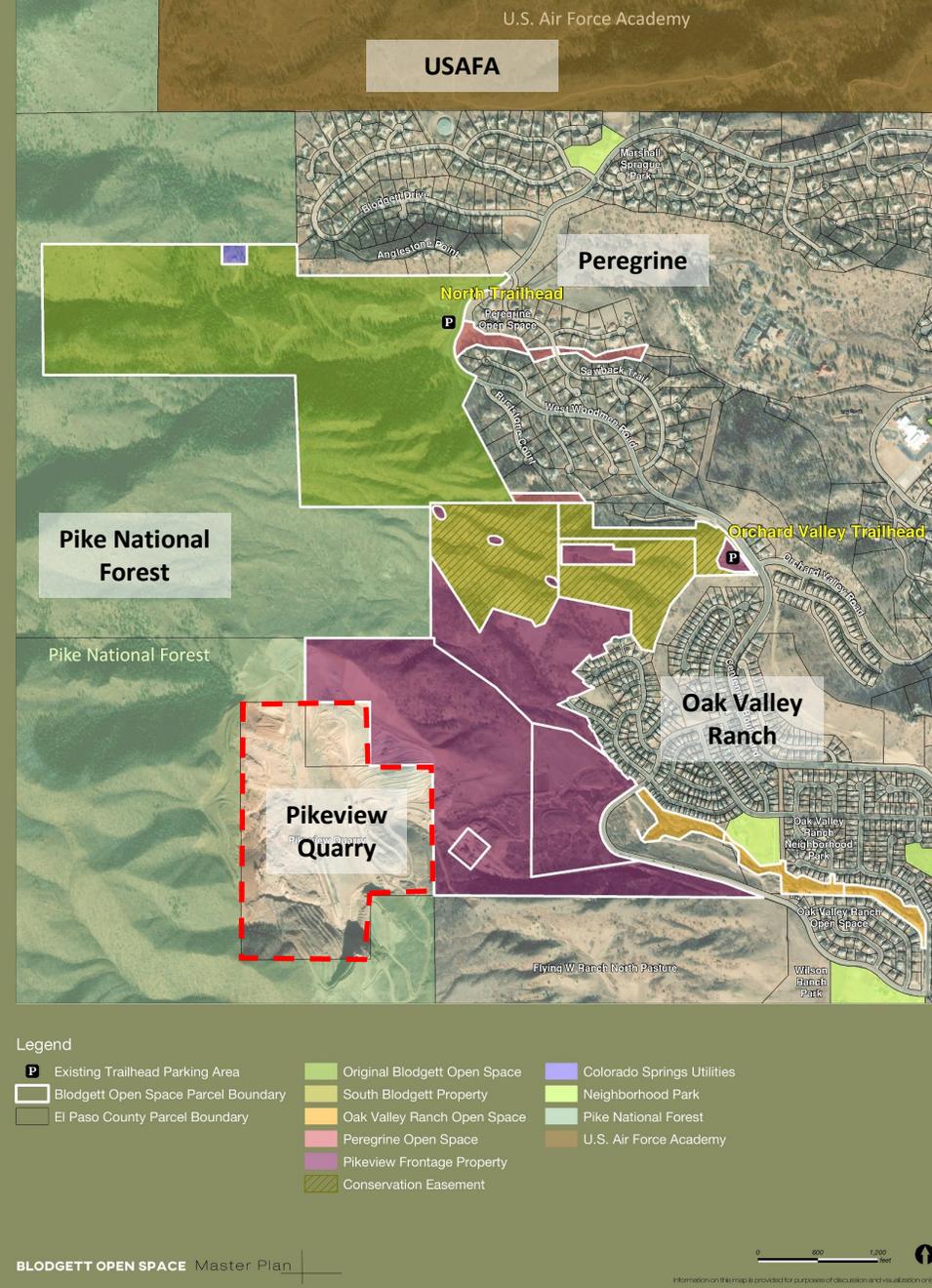
- ➔  **Take Care of What We Have**
-  **Diversify Financial Strategies, including New Methods of Funding**
- ➔  **Broaden, Enhance and Promote Recreation Opportunities**
- ➔  **Continue Open Space Conservation in Advance of Development**
- ➔  **Build our Community with the Understanding that Parks, Open Space and Trails Create Great Neighborhoods**
- ➔  **Manage Parks for Better Usability and Greater Enjoyment**
-  **Enhance and Formulate Strong and Broad Partnerships**

Parks System Master Plan, Page 10

Property Overview

- ❑ 384 Acres TOPS Acquired Open Space (20-year acquisition history)
- ❑ Significant high-value natural and cultural resources
- ❑ Wildlife habitat (burned and non-burned areas)
- ❑ Highly used for passive recreation and wildlife viewing
- ❑ Provides gateway into National Forest Lands
- ❑ Two Trailheads with 24 parking stalls (21 -23 on Woodmen Rd)
- ❑ 16.5 miles of trail (7.1mi designated, 9.4 mi illegal)





TOPS Acquired Open Space

- ❑ 2001 - 167 Acres referred to as “Original Blodgett”
- ❑ 2018 – 64 Acres referred to as “South Blodgett”
 - ❑ Includes three conservations easements
- ❑ 2020/21 – 154 Acres referred to as “Pikeview Frontage”

Dedicated Open Space

- ❑ 1994 /96 – 5.07 Acres of Peregrine Open Space
- ❑ 1980 – 9.97 Acres of Oak Valley Ranch Open Space

Non-City Property not Included in public process

- ❑ Pikeview Quarry - 100 acres
- ❑ Under private ownership
- ❑ Undergoing a reclamation plan
- ❑ NOT part of Blodgett Open Space nor the Master Plan

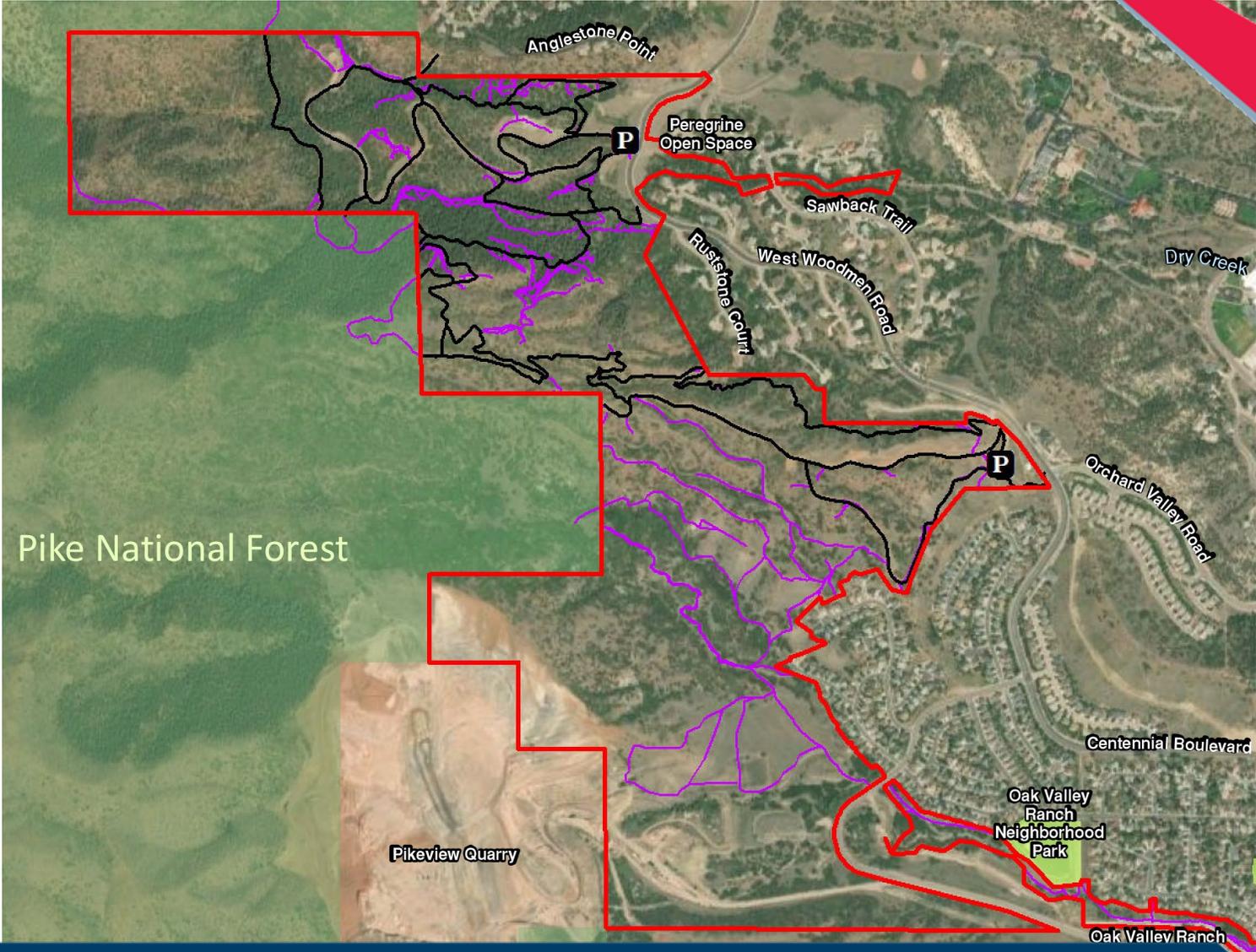




Existing Conditions



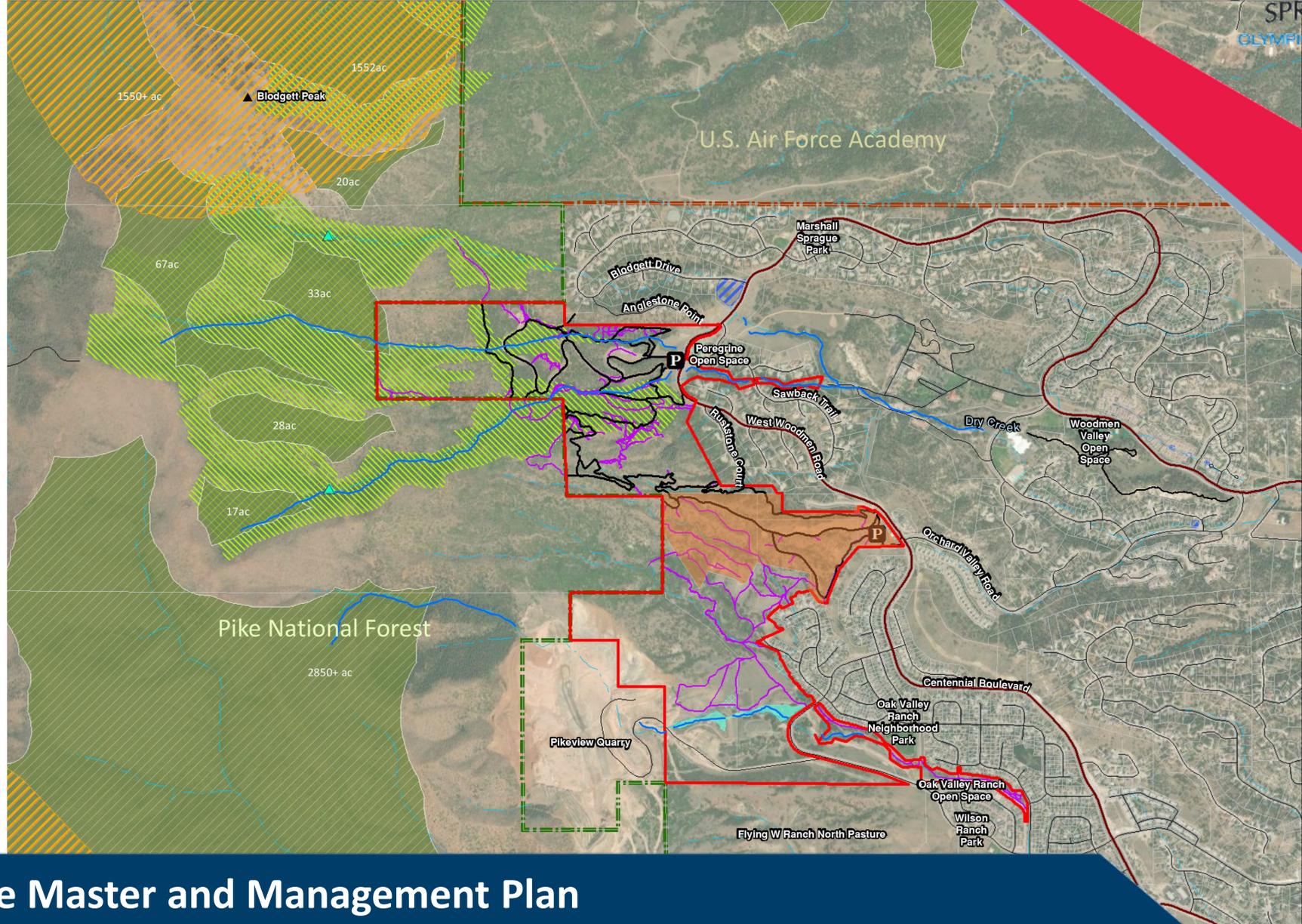
- Legend
- P** Parking/Trailhead
 - Red outline** Blodgett Open Space
 - Black line** Designated Trail
 - Purple line** Undesignated Trail
 - Light green** Neighborhood Park
 - Dark green** Pike National Forest
 - Brown** U.S. Air Force Academy



Site Assessment – Key Habitat Areas

Legend

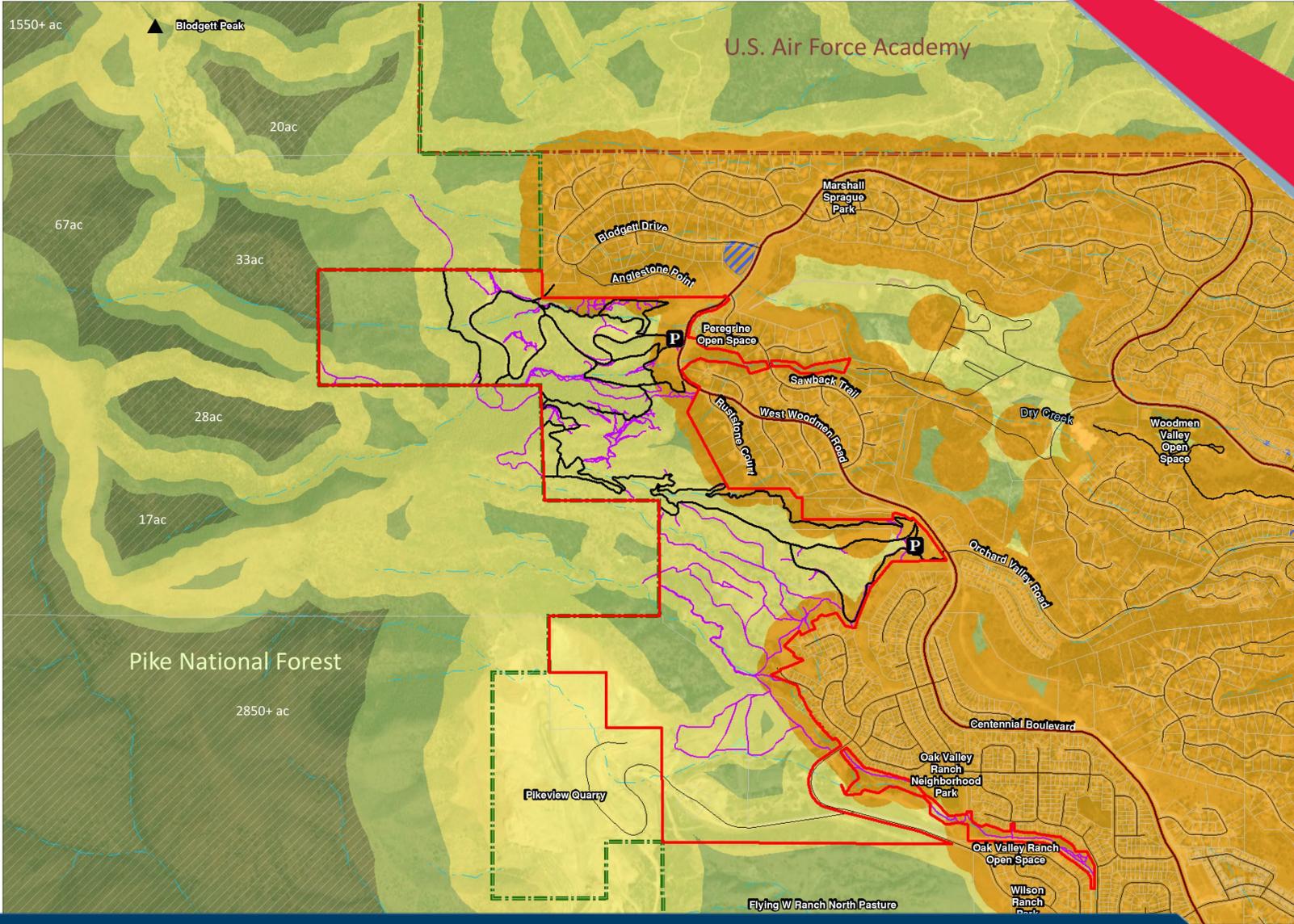
-  Parking/Trailhead
-  Blodgett Open Space
-  Designated Trail
-  Undesignated Trail
-  Parcel Boundary
-  Water Crossing
-  Perennial Stream
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Intermittent Poond
-  Pond
-  Pike National Forest
-  U.S. Air Force Academy
-  Riparian
-  Bighorn Production Area
-  Core Habitat
-  Conifer Forest



Habitat Fragmentation



- Legend
- P Parking/Trailhead
 - Blodgett Open Space
 - Designated Trail
 - Undesignated Trail
 - Parcel Boundary
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Intermittent Poond
 - Pond
 - Pike National Forest
 - U.S. Air Force Academy
 - High Disturbance
 - Medium Disturbance
 - Secondary Habitat
 - Core Habitat

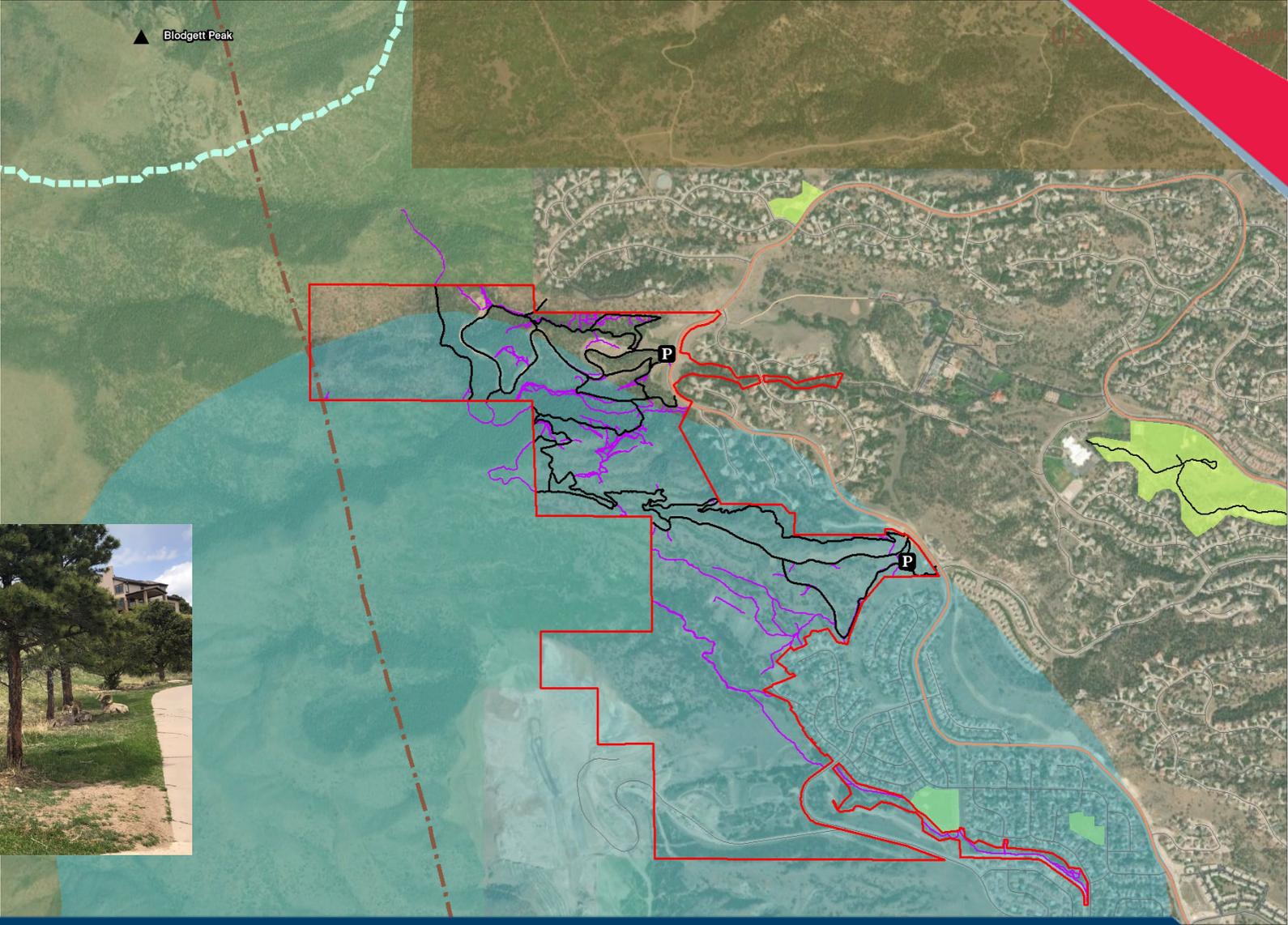


Bighorn Sheep Habitat



Legend

- P** Parking/Trailhead
- Blodgett Open Space
- Designated Trail
- Undesignated Trail
- Bighorn Migration Patterns
- Bighorn Production Area
- Bighorn Winter Range
- Neighborhood Park
- Pike National Forest
- U.S. Air Force Academy





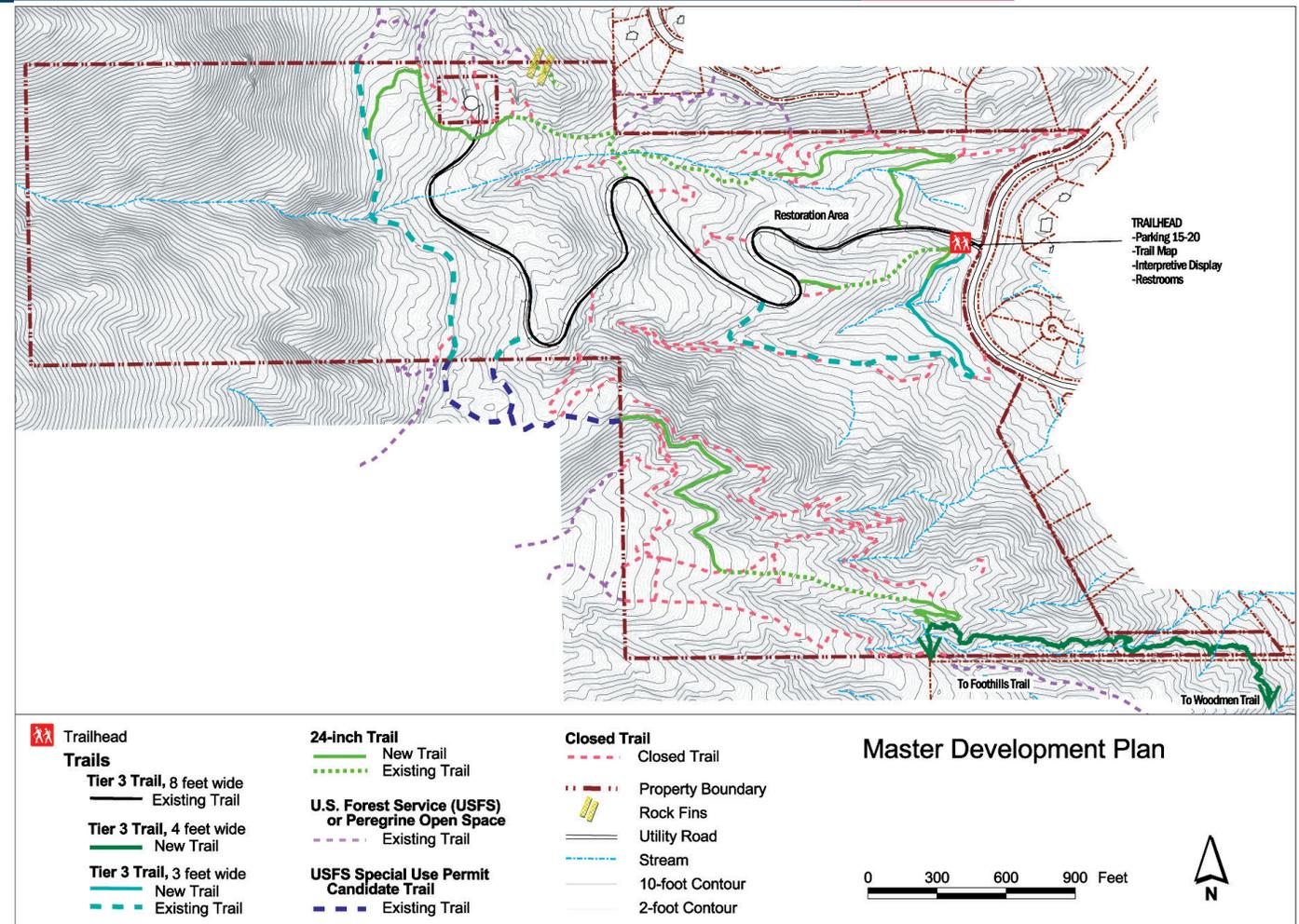
Master Plan Process

Blodgett Open Space Master Plan



2002 MASTER PLAN

- ❑ Established a plan for the 2001 TOPS acquired property (167 acres)
- ❑ 5- month long public process
- ❑ Plan's Goals: Balance recreation and natural resource protection
 - ❑ Preserve Blodgett Open Space's natural resources
 - ❑ Promote the conservation and restoration of natural communities
 - ❑ Provide an inspiration wildland interaction
 - ❑ Provide engaging interpretive and educational opportunities
 - ❑ Maintain and enhance connectivity and stewardship of Colorado Springs' Open Space
 - ❑ Adhere to the guidelines established in the Colorado Springs TOPS Ordinance and Open Space Master Plan



PURPOSE OF MASTER PLAN

- ❑ Encompass **increased** Open Space acreage
- ❑ **Balance** current and future recreational needs of the community with conservation of resources
- ❑ Establish a **comprehensive long-range plan** (15-20 years) for Blodgett Open Space
- ❑ Establish expectations based on **resource assessment, Parks' experience, and community values**
- ❑ Address **public access, habitat protection, resource management, public safety, and neighborhood concerns**



PROCESS TIMELINE



Public Engagement Process

1,919+ Citizen Engagements

14 public meetings

- ❑ Community workshops (3)
- ❑ On-site events (4)
- ❑ Parks Advisory Board (3)
- ❑ TOPS Working Committee (3)
- ❑ Neighborhood Focus (1)

6 Online Surveys

- ❑ Photo preference survey (1)
- ❑ Post workshop surveys (3)
- ❑ Draft Plan Reviews (2)

5 Stakeholder meetings

4 Agency meetings



Total number of community members reached that include 536 people in-person. Of the 2,111 online responses, 728 were identical duplicates from the same email or unconfirmed (i.e. robot, automatic generation, no email). Best estimate is 1,384 unique online responses.

Public Engagement Project Team and Partners



City Forestry
City Traffic and Engineering
Colorado Springs Utilities
Colorado Springs Fire Department
Colorado Springs Police Department

Colorado Parks and Wildlife
United States Forest Service
United States Air Force Academy
US Fish and Wildlife Service



Project Team

Resource and Subject Matter Experts

Environmental Planning
Natural Resource Planning
Archeology
Wildlife Biology
Landscape Architecture
Watershed Science
Civil Engineering
Park Planning
Trail Design
Public Engagement

Public Facilitation
Public Relations
Communications
Drone Technologies
Arboriculture
Forestry
Fire Mitigation
Traffic Engineering
Public Safety/Police





Master Plan

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan



Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan Overview

Expand and Enhance Wildlife Habitat Areas

- Manage users with strategically planned trail system
- Expand habitat areas and promote wildlife corridors
- Restoration of habitat areas through improved management

Establish a Sustainable Trail System

- 14.2 miles master planned trail
- 11.3 miles closure and restoration of existing trails
- ~22% Net reduction of trails (illegal & existing) within the open space

Non-motorized Recreational Use (mileage approximate)

- 9.9 miles of multi-use trail
- 0.5 miles of multi-use trail with uphill bike only
- 2.3 miles of Directional downhill bike trail
- 1.5 miles of Hiking only trail
- Paragliding access, programming area, track chair access



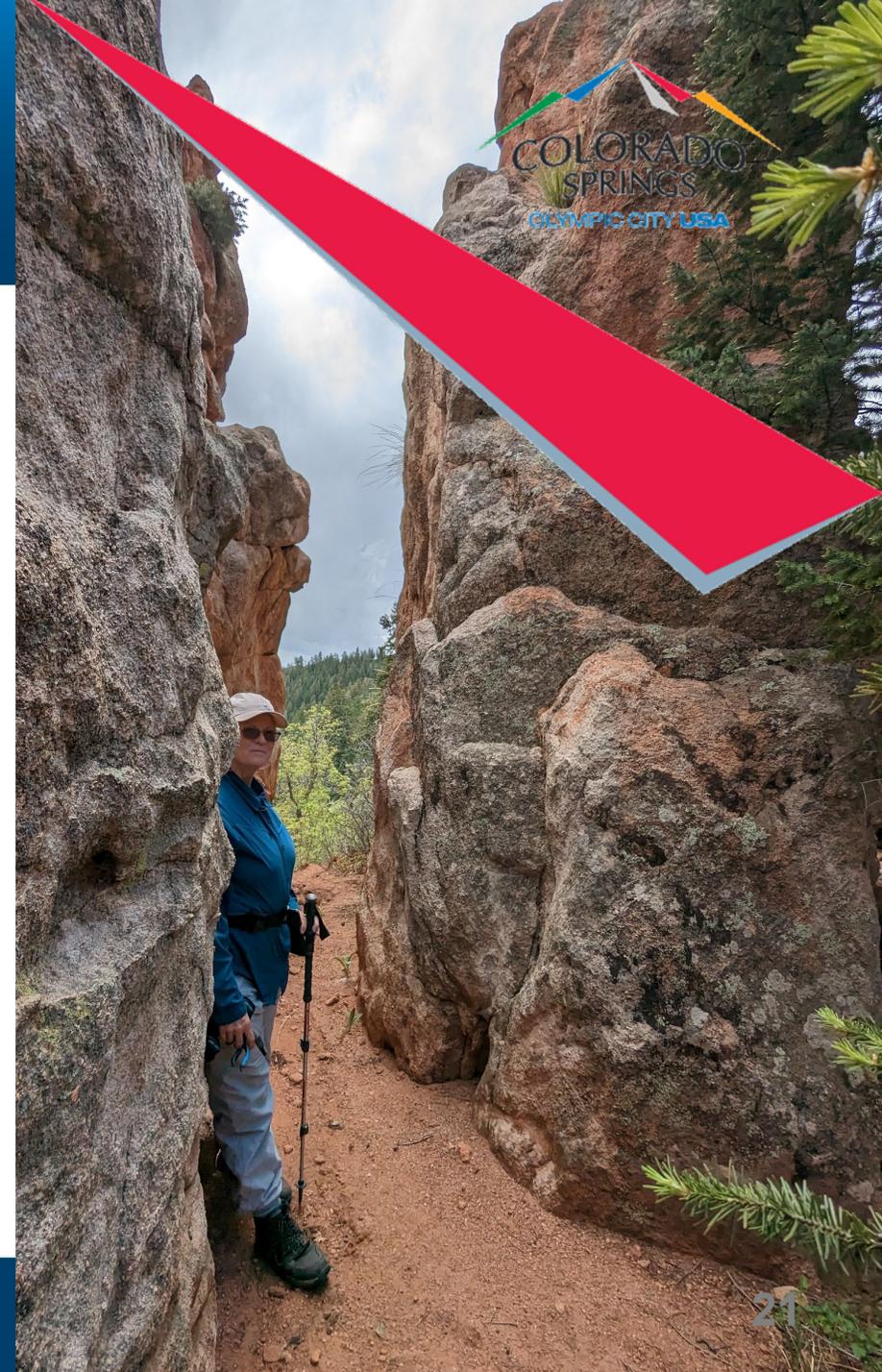
Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan Overview

Designate, Enhance and Improve Access

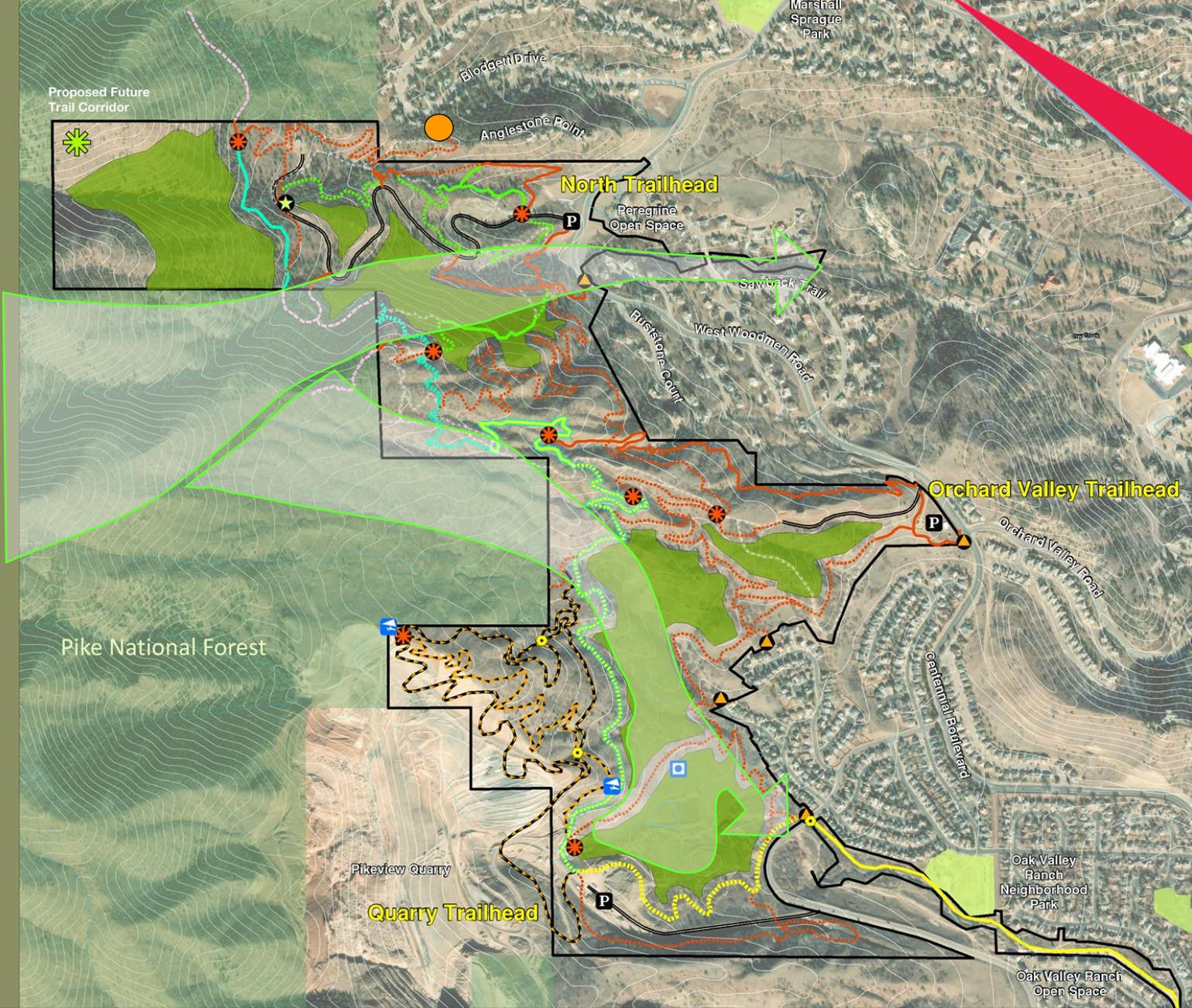
- Open space amenities
 - Trailheads
 - Neighborhood access
 - Trails
 - Interpretative
 - Wayfinding/Signage
- Regional connectivity
 - USFS preferred alternative plan
 - Connectivity to other Parks and Open Spaces

Holistic and Adaptative Management Approach

- Habitat enhancement, resource protection and forest health
- Trailhead management, access management and priorities
- Adapt to changing conditions, impact and trends



Approved*
**Master
Plan**



Master Plan

Perspective View



Potential Peak Access Corridor
subject to possible future Forest Service NEPA process

Blodgett Peak

Potential Interface Trail Zone
subject to possible future Forest Service NEPA process

Quarry **P**
Trailhead

P
North Trailhead

P
Orchard Valley Trailhead

Centennial Boulevard

West Woodmen Road

Orchard Valley Road



Management Plan

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan



Management Plan

Integrating an Adaptive Management Approach



- ❑ Resource Management
- ❑ Trails and Recreation Management
- ❑ Neighborhood Access and Trailhead Management
- ❑ Perimeter Management
- ❑ Regulatory and Policy Management
- ❑ Implementation Priorities and Costs

Each section includes:

- ❑ General description and guidance on the character experience, and specific management goals envisioned during the planning process.
- ❑ Monitoring Indicators – what to monitor
- ❑ Phase 1- 3 Implementation Actions and defined thresholds for action for specific conditions

Blodgett Open Space Management Goals

The following goals were drawn from consistent responses received during the public engagement and planning process. They are intended to serve as guideposts during implementation of the Master and Management Plan.

Preserve and Protect the Open Space's Natural Character

- Maintain the rustic nature
- Preserve the natural beauty
- As good stewards, preserve the Open Space for future generations with sustainable use today

Manage the Trail System

- Establish a well-defined and well-maintained trail system
- Using sustainable design and decision-making principles, establish a trail system that supports current and future recreation
- Meet a variety of users' needs that promote use and compliance of designated trails
- Connect to the regional trail system
- Pursue connections with the USFS lands
- Plan for appropriate recreational uses that complement the natural environment

Manage and Sustain the Open Space

- Implement the Master and Management Plan
- Enhance and implement a monitoring and maintenance plan
- Manage and mitigate erosion throughout the Open Space
- Establish forest restoration and forest health strategies including long-term wildfire mitigation
- Enforce Open Space rules
- Create a safe Open Space where all users can get along
- Anticipate and manage increased use
- Provide adequate parking

Involve the Public

- Solicit and value public input
- Support the Open Space with volunteers and partnerships focused on preservation and recreation



Blodgett Appeal

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan



Appeal claim #1



“The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department's deeply flawed citizen input process didn't present to citizens all possible options for the future of Blodgett Open Space and disregarded citizen evidence/input.”

Concern/Feedback

Master Plan Process

- Too fast of a process
- Too slow of a process
- Not enough public outreach nor clear communication from City
- Disregarded citizen input
- Not all options considered



Addressing the Concern

Process

- Following recommendations of International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
- Plan adopted Project Givens for plan framework
- Our planning process set March 2023 through March 2024
- Extended 1 month to review and address additional comments (Through April 2024)

Communication/Outreach/input

Consistent outreach process included:

- Social Media, Next Door, and media coverage
- Active Project webpage
- Stakeholder outreach, word of mouth
- TOPS Working committee and Parks Advisory Board Updates
- Ongoing opportunities to share input

High numbers of participation throughout process represented strong engagement



Oct 22, 2023: Community Workshop

Addressing the concern

Robust engagement

“By the Numbers”:

- *1,900 + citizen engagement*
- *Stakeholder Action Committee*
- *14 public meetings*
- *3 separate surveys, each 30-day period*

Grateful for the community sharing their ideas, thoughts, and concerns

Acknowledge differing of opinions and the plan represents balanced approach

The community’s feedback shaped the Plan

Plan adhered to the Parks Review Criteria in the 2014 Parks System Master Plan

Common Concerns (no particular order)

1. ***Public Communication of Master Plan Process***
2. ***Traffic Impacts***
3. ***Fire Evacuation***
4. ***Turning Blodgett into Theme Park***
5. ***Impacts on Property Values***
6. ***Security and Crime, Trailhead Management***
7. ***Trailheads/Parking***
8. ***Trails***
9. ***Wildlife***

Public Engagement Process

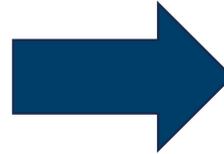
Early public engagement, on-site meetings, stakeholder action committee, agency meetings, online surveys



Plan Refinement

Issues, opportunities and constraints, Public preference, important elements, community vision for property

Plan alternatives, priorities, trail system and open space access concepts, trailhead concepts



Trail alignments, open space access, trail connectivity, trailhead size and location, habitat corridors

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan

9 Picnic Areas and Shelters
10 Nature-based Playground
11 Restrooms
12 Habitat Protection
13 Winter Sports Trails
14 Paragliding and Hang gliding Launch and Landing Sites
15 Visitor / Regional Trail
16 Accession Management

Tell us what you want to see!
● Place a green sticker on the features you want to see in the open space.
● Place a red sticker on the features you are not interested in seeing in the open space.

Stay Informed! 719-799-6662 Blodgett
coloradosprings.gov/Blodgett

Visual Preference Engagement to Date by the Numbers



Top five features the community would LIKE to see in the plan

- 1 Advanced Single-Use Mountain Biking Trails
- 2 Multiuse Trails
- 3 Advanced Single-Use Hiking Trails
- 4 Paragliding Launch and Landing Sites
- 5 Habitat Protection



Top feature the community would NOT like to see in the plan

Accessible Trails for Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices



Features with no clear preference (equal yesses and noes)

- Chairlift Access to Upper Elevations
- Off leash Dog Area
- Visitor/Regional Trailhead/ Interpretative Center

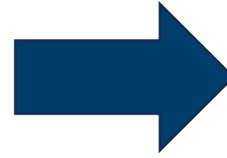
*Participants (407) were in favor of all other images.

Addressing the concern



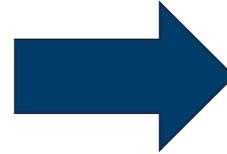
Public Engagement Process

Draft plan review, alignment on a preferred plan



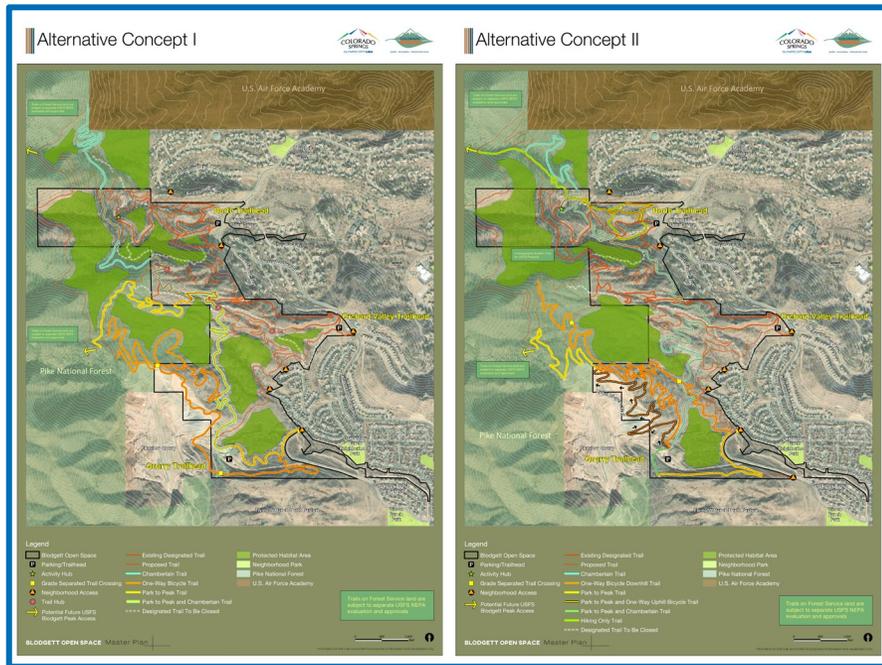
Plan Refinement

Trail corridors, single use trails type and location, management goals, priorities, and adaptive strategies



Specific master plan recommendations, management recommendations, priorities, and costs

Public review plan and final plan review



Addressing the concern

Appeal claim #2

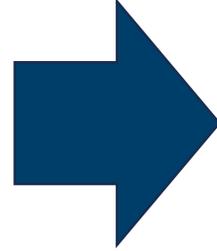


“Inaccurate and/or incomplete information presented by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department to the public, the TOPS Working Committee and the Parks Board regarding fire, parking/traffic and wildlife.”

Concern/Feedback

Wildfires and Fire Evacuation

- Evacuation details
- Increase in use impacts evacuation
- Higher risk to fire events



Addressing the Concern **Management Related**

- Collaborate with Fire Department
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan

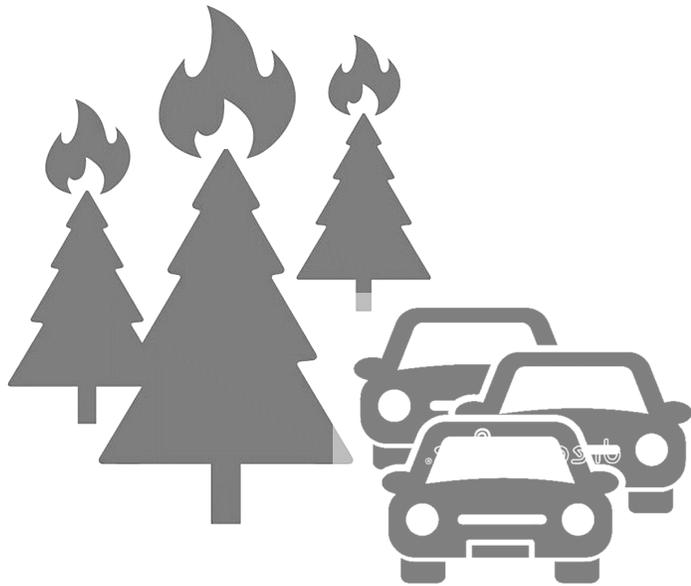
Colorado Springs Wildfire Ready

<https://www.coswildfireready.org/>

- Close open space as needed proactively or in emergencies
- More trail use, may provide quicker notification in emergencies, and easier responder access

Site Improvements

- Dispersed access points and trailheads, reduce concentrated parking, reduces traffic volume
 - Open space parking located behind access gates
 - Sustainable Trail System – fuels break and improved access, signed trails for better identification
 - Open Space Forest Restoration (reduced biomass)
- * Fire mitigation supports reduced risk, defensible space, more aggressive fire fighting response opportunity.

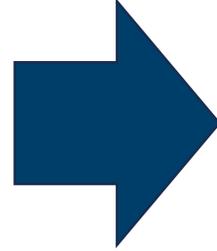


Addressing the concern

Concern/Feedback

Traffic Impacts

- Increase in use
- More congestion
- Speeding in neighborhoods
- Proposed 4-way Stop at Woodmen/Centennial and Orchard Valley



Addressing the Concern

Management Related

- Open Space use for the community (existing use)
- Sustainably accommodate increase in open space demand, use and impact
- Collaborate with City Traffic and Engineering and Police Department for issues outside open space
- Phased implementation on trailhead expansion, as needed with increase demand
- Removed proposed 4-way stop with this Plan
- Allow for new public process if new issues arise

Site Improvements

- Plan creates dispersed open space access
- Three trailheads (Quarry Trailhead largest)
- Six neighborhood access points
- Reduced total parking available based on feedback received from community



Addressing the concern

Concern/Feedback

Trailheads/Parking

- Too much parking provided
- Parking will create issues
- Parking in neighborhoods, in front of houses
- Not enough parking



Addressed in Plan

Management Related

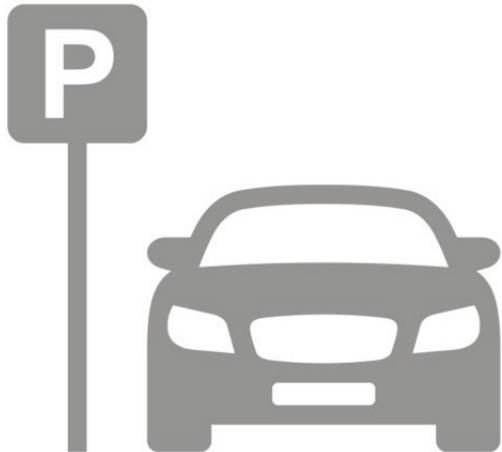
- Move parking amenities internal to open space, all parking behind closure gates
- Focus to reduce on-street parking and neighborhood impacts
- Consider public access to Pike National Forest and Blodgett Peak
- Trailhead management strategies

Site Improvements

Moving parking at north lot, slight increase in available parking

Orchard valley adjusts up 2 space for 15

Quarry Trailhead – coincides with the closure and concluding reclamation work. There will no longer be haul trucks, heavy equipment, crews and staff at the adjacent quarry. The land use changes from mining operations to open space – change in use.



Addressing the concern

North Trailhead

-Image from 3/27/22

-30 cars on Woodmen

-11 cars in Trailhead



North Trailhead

-Changed from 60 stalls to 51 stalls total

-ALL Open Space parking within designated parking lot

-Improve safety on Woodmen Rd and bike lane

-ALL legal parking stalls behind nighttime closure gate

-Any additional parking would require public process



North Trailhead

1. Potential future parking spaces. Includes Utilities access, landscape islands and possible retaining walls.
2. Utilities Access Gate
3. Trailhead Amenities: Restroom, Signage, Map
4. Nighttime Closure Gate



Orchard Valley Trailhead

- As presented August 22, 2023



Orchard Valley Trailhead

1. Expanded Trailhead with parking – up to 60 spaces.
2. Removes derelict barn structures.
3. Future controlled intersection at W Woodmen/ Orchard Valley Road to enhance public safety (pedestrian and vehicular).
4. Location provides better surveillance from the public street.
5. Public surveillance mitigates nighttime nefarious activities.
6. Trailhead is closer to some neighbors and Centennial Blvd.
7. Opportunity to restore current parking area (13 spaces) and create an interpretive area.

Addressed in Plan

Orchard Valley Trailhead

- Went from 60 stalls to 15 stalls
- Eliminated the 4-way stop on Woodmen Road
- Adjusted Location of Trailhead Amenities (toilet)
- Relocation of a trailhead to lower level and access to Woodmen road would require an additional public process

Orchard Valley Trailhead

- As Shown in Approved Plan April 22, 2024



Orchard Valley Trailhead

1. Existing Parking with up to 2 additional spaces
2. Nighttime Closure Gate
3. Telecommunications Access Gate
4. Trailhead Amenities: Restroom, Signage, Maps
5. Potential future trailhead area includes landscape islands and landscape berms - subject to additional public process
6. Potential Future Trailhead Driveway and Nighttime Closure Gate - subject to additional public process

Quarry Trailhead

- As presented Aug 22, 2023



New Quarry Trailhead

1. New Trailhead with parking – up to 250 spaces
2. Location accesses new southern areas of BOS and possible future bike park.
3. Possible “pre-leash walk” dog run area.
4. Nighttime gate at Allegheny when BOS is closed.
5. Distance from Allegheny Drive may discourage nighttime nefarious activities.
6. Trailhead is removed from neighborhoods.
7. Possible use of existing building for regional trailhead/interpretive center or parks maintenance use or future bike park support.
8. Trail system connections needed.

Addressed in Plan Quarry Trailhead

- Reduced from 250 stalls to 180 stalls

- Phased implementation approach

- Start at 50, then increases based on indicators to 180

- Intent to take pressure off of North Trailhead and the Orchard Valley Trailhead

- Further expansion beyond 180 stalls would require an additional public process

Orchard Valley Trailhead

- As Shown in Approved Plan April 2024



Quarry Trailhead

1. Quarry Access Gate
2. Trailhead Amenities: Restroom, Signage, Maps
3. Limit of public vehicle gate
4. Initial Parking Area includes landscape islands
5. Potential Future Parking Expansion
6. Nighttime Closure Gate at Allegheny

Concern/Feedback

Wildlife

- Keep undeveloped
- Impacts to Wildlife with more use
- More studies needed before moving forward

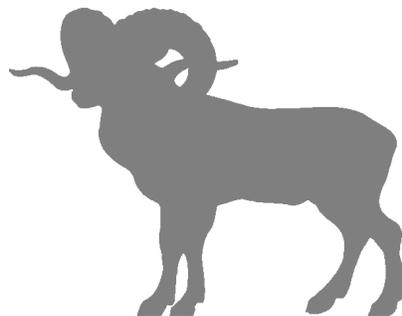
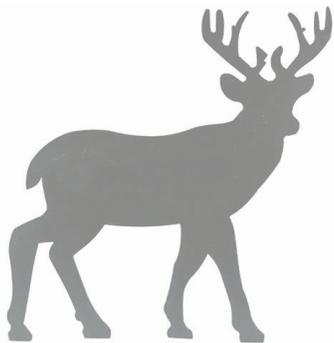


Addressed in Plan **Management Related**

- Plan reflects community's strong commitment to habitat protection
- Continue and enhance monitoring and survey program
- Ongoing coordinate with Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Adaptive management strategies
- If impacts arise, implement:
 - Seasonal trail closures
 - Restricting dog use from open space
 - Closing trails, limiting public access

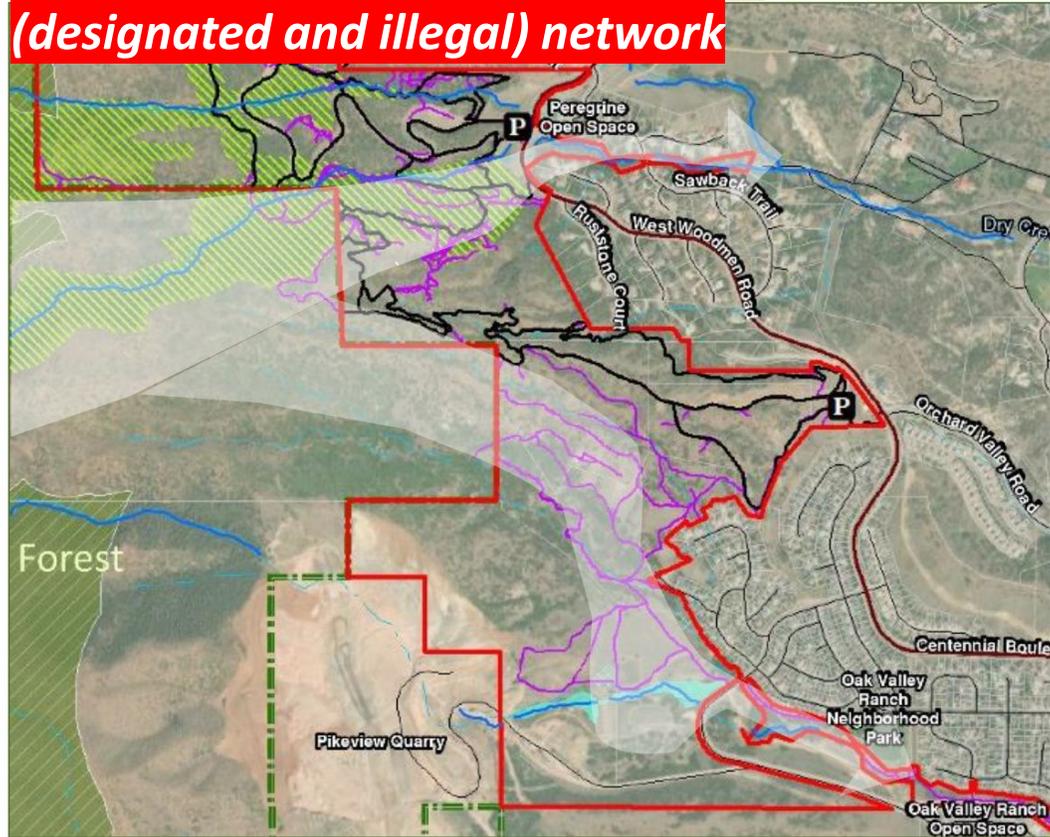
Site Improvements

- Integrate two wildlife corridors and expanded/enhanced habitat areas
- Restore open space / habitat areas
- Establish a sustainable trail system
- Reduced Master Plan Trails plan by 1.5%
- Closure of 11.4 miles of unsustainable trails (existing and illegal). Overall reduction of trails by 22%

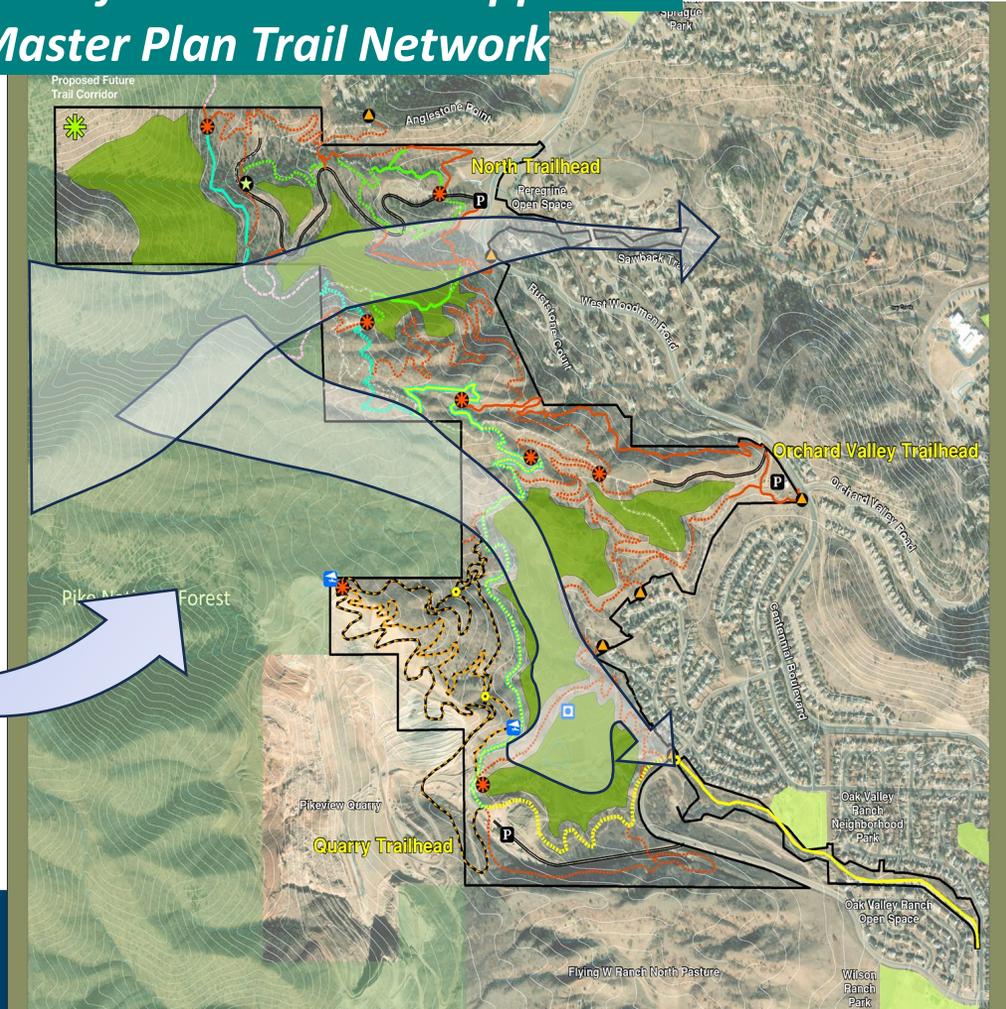


Addressing the concern

Wildlife Corridor and existing trail (designated and illegal) network



Wildlife Corridors and approved Master Plan Trail Network



Addressing the concern

Appeal claim # 3



“An appearance that special-interests steered the decision-making process resulting in a plan which favors a limited demographic, veers radically from the original purchase intent, and replaces a thorough and scientific preservation-based master plan with a recreation-based master plan.”

Blodgett Master and Management Plan

- ❑ *1,900 + citizen engagement*
- ❑ *Active Stakeholder Action Committee*
- ❑ *14 public meetings*
- ❑ *3 separate surveys, each 30-day period*

Open Space Master Plan Review Criteria

- ❑ *2014 Parks System Master Plan*
- ❑ *TOPS Ordinance*
- ❑ *Balance of recreation and natural resource preservation*
- ❑ *Sustainable Public Access*
- ❑ *Stewardship of the resources*



Concern/Feedback

Recreation

- Maintenance and safety concerns
- Keep trail difficulty
- Not enough hiking
- Too much bike influence



Addressed in Plan

Management Related

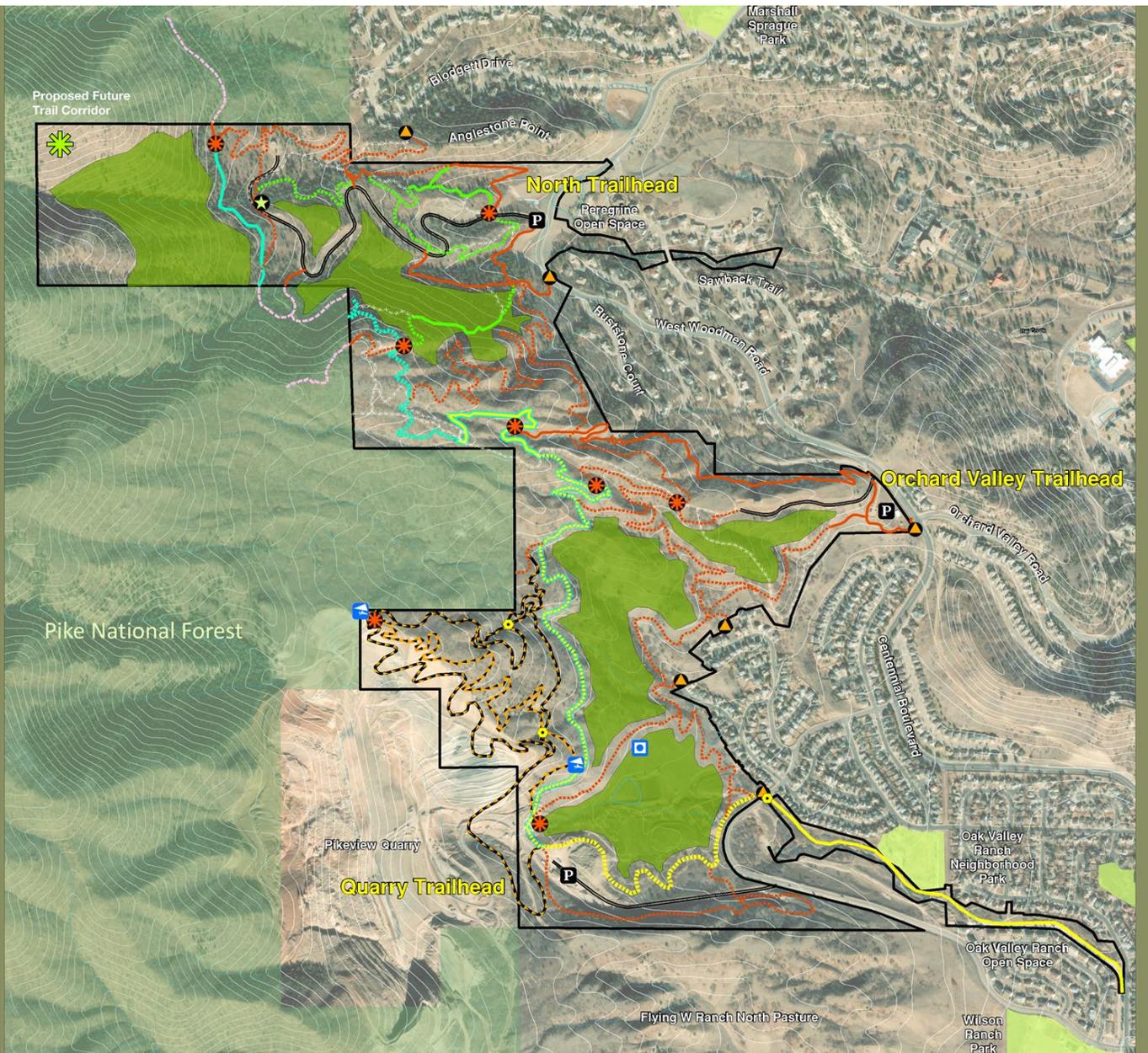
- Defining and organizing element
- Sustainable master planned trail system based on community feedback
- Balance wildlife and resource conservation with recreation and public access
- Improve user experience and safety, reduce maintenance costs/needs

Site Improvements

- Sustainable, resilient and high-quality trail system professionally designed, built and managed
- Provides access and experiences users are seeking; encouraging use of designated trails
- Incorporates Single-Use Trails for experience and safety reasons (generated from public process)



Addressing the concern



Trail Type

Estimated Trail Mileage

Master Plan Recommended System Trails
(excludes roads)

14.2 miles

Multi-use Trails

10.4 miles

Hiking-only Trails

1.5 miles

Downhill Biking-only Trails

2.3 miles

Existing roads to be retained

1.5 roads

Existing system & illegal trails and roads to be closed

11.4 miles



Addressing the concern





Plan Approval

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan



Approval Process



TOPS Working Committee April 3rd, 2024

A motion to recommend approval and adoption of the Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan as presented and to include the TOPS Working Committee modification to allow up to 51 parking spaces at the North Trailhead, where a maximum of 41 space were presented.

Passed 8-0

Parks Advisory Board April 11th, 2024

A motion to approval and adoption of the Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan as presented and to include the TOPS Working Committee modification to allow up to 51 parking spaces at the North Trailhead, where a maximum of 41 space were presented.

Passed 7-1.

Dissenting vote was in favor of delaying master plan until a future time, if and when the reclaimed Pikeview Quarry property may be donated to the City

Staff Recommendation

- ❑ Staff recommends denial of the appeal
- ❑ Uphold the approval and adoption of the Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan as approved by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Advisory Board on April 11th, 2024.
- ❑ Meets the review criteria of the 2014 Parks System Master Plan and the TOPS Ordinance
- ❑ Provides balance of recreation and resource protection





Thank You!

Blodgett Open Space Master and Management Plan

