

# A Prairie Necklace

## A Place in Time

Presentation:

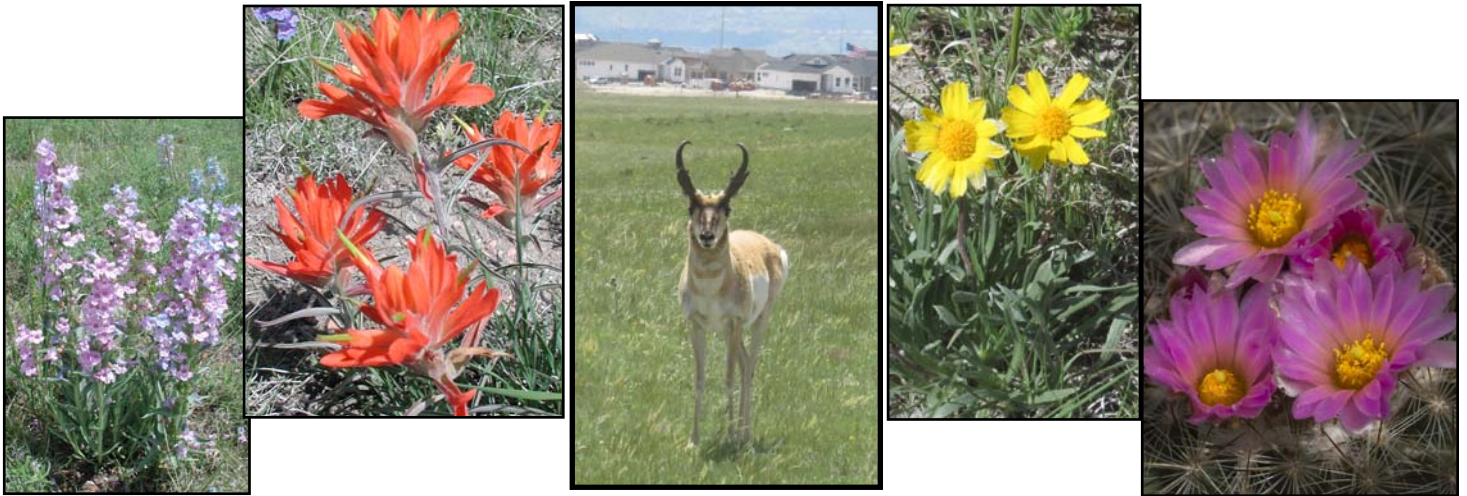
September 17, 2019 - El Paso County Planning Commission - 20 min - Informational

September 19, 2019 - Colorado Springs Planning Commission - 20 min - Informational

by

Dr. Judith von Ahlefeldt PhD

Landscape Ecologist



**Prairie in Colorado Springs & El Paso County**

*Will this only be a memory in photos?*

# PlanCOS

Colorado Springs- January 2019

ADOPTED

*Majestic Landscapes - Unique Places - Strong Connections*

*What if? A PRAIRIE NECKLACE !*



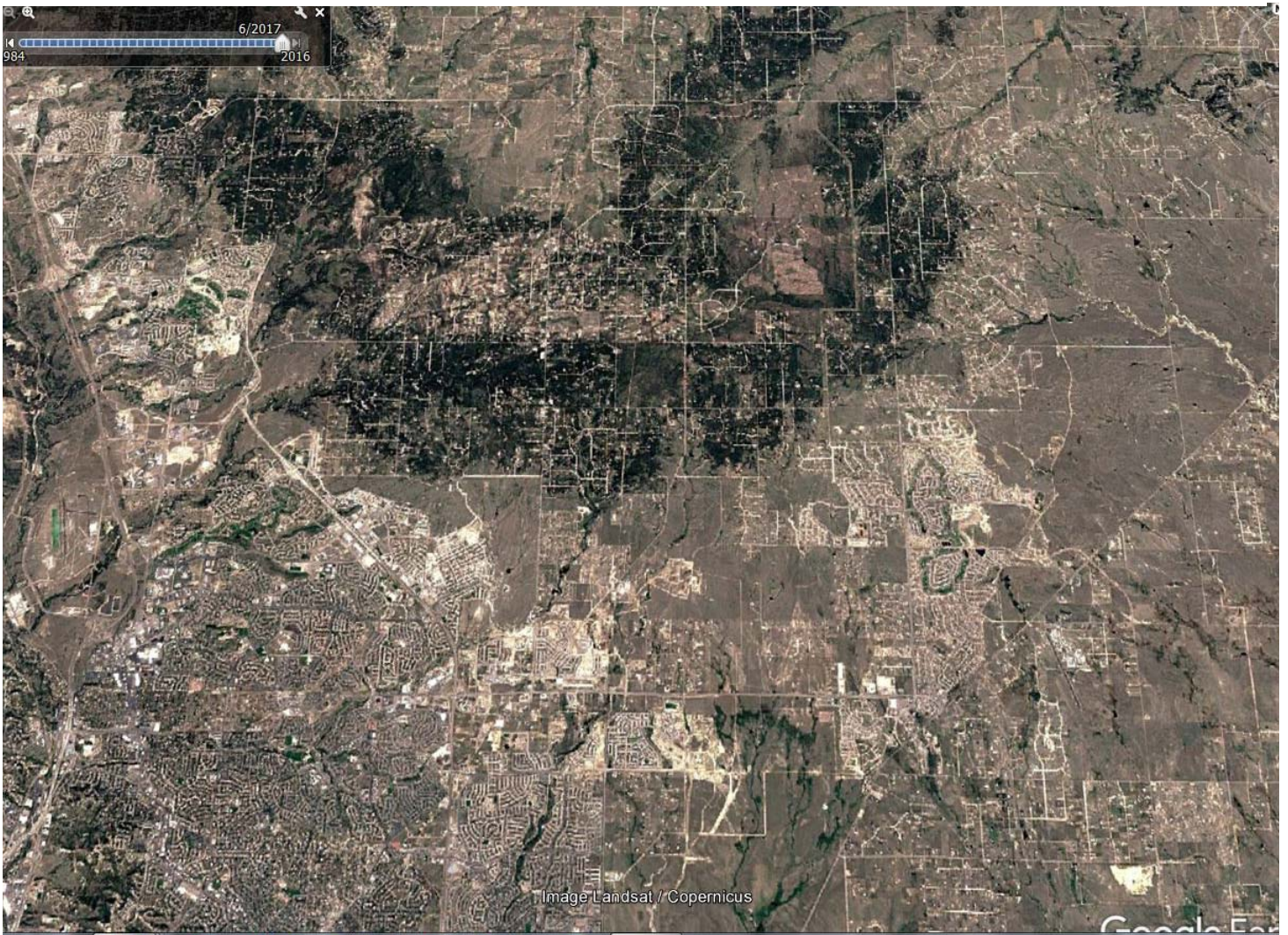
**THE UNIQUE, MAJESTIC WESTERN EDGE OF THE GREAT PLAINS AND THE NORTH AMERICAN CORDILLERA IN EL PASO COUNTY, CO.**



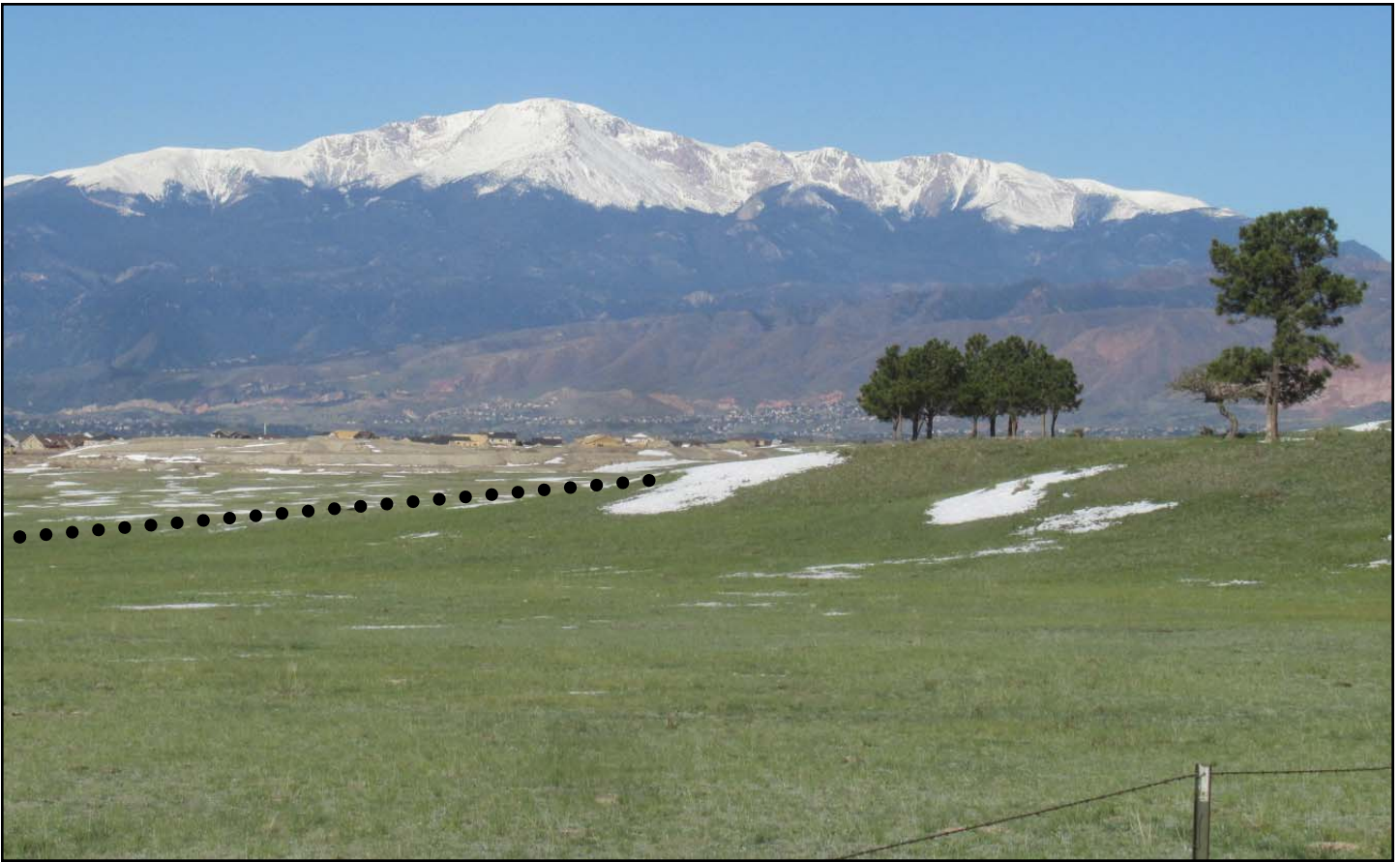
**EL PASO COUNTY**

**(December 2018 to December 2021 - IN PROGRESS September 2019)**

**Can the  
Planning Commissions,  
Planning Departments,  
Development Community  
& Decision makers of Colorado Springs & El Paso County  
work together now  
- in 2019/2020 -  
to create A Prairie Necklace  
connecting key patches  
of ungraded native regional Prairie Grassland  
in the urban-rural interface  
of Colorado Springs and El Paso County?**



## Can a Prairie Necklace be like this foreground?



The majestic view of Pikes Peak from the unique edge of the Black Forest and adjacent Prairie. Old Ranch Road (east) is along the lower edge of this view.



Can the sea of urban rooftops, like these along Black Forest and Woodmen Road, transition gently into permanent open space in many areas around the edge of Black Forest?





**There is a choice**



# **A Proposal to Implement**

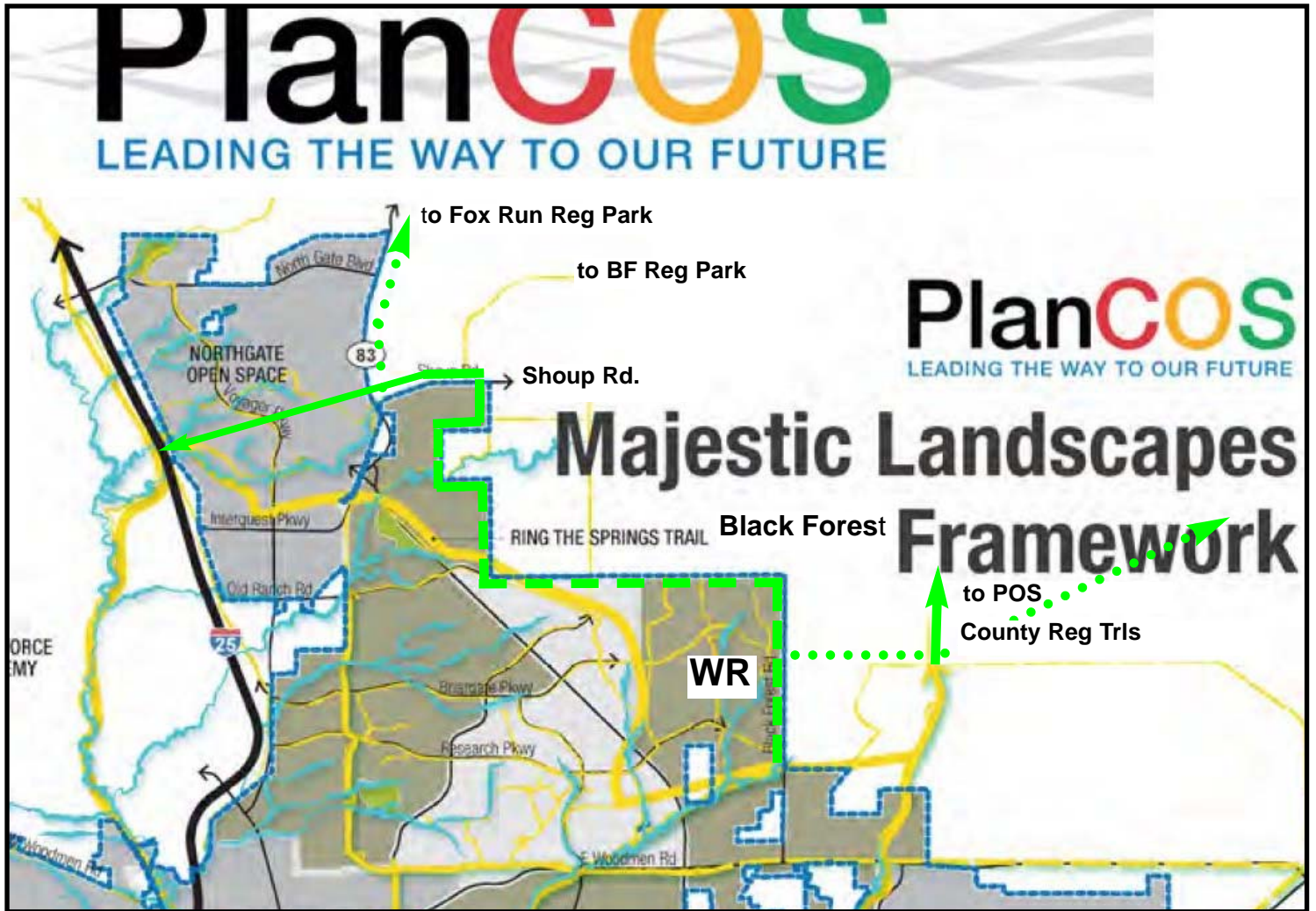
## **The Vision**

Introduced at  
Feb. 2019  
after Wolf Ranch Public Mtg #1

### **A Prairie Necklace**

- **Creates an integrated and linked system convenient to many neighborhoods**
- **Connects watersheds across ridges**
- **Defines Urban to Rural Residential Transition for much of NE Colorado Springs**
- **Adds perimeter trail to “Ring the Springs” system**
- **Creates cooperative City/County prairie open space**
- **Establishes a wide buffer (~300 feet) to:**
  - **Soften the urban-rural residential edge**
  - **Enable Prairie wildlife corridor**
  - **Offer a primitive trail amenity in a native prairie context (no overlot grading)**
  - **Preserve visual amenities**
  - **Mitigate road noise**
  - **Provide room for snow drift management**
  - **Establish multiple strong City- County trail connections**
  - **Conserve local plant genomes**

# Cooperation, Coordination - a win-win - Making it whole.



- Shoup/SH83 - has a pedestrian bridge built under SH 83 on Black Squirrel Creek by CDOT decades ago which is part of both the City and County Parks Plans to reach Santa Fe Trail. Connects with the planned La Foret Trail (County), City Trails, and potential trail to Hodgen Road to other County trails when SH83 is improved.



- **City Parks is working on options for Open Space/trails north of Old Ranch Road.**
- **There are “pinch points” in the City where the opportunity for a meaningful native prairie buffer is minimal, but at least trail connections can still happen. (South Howells Road/ Pike Creek HS Area, Cordera/Milam/Union/ Bradley Ranch areas).**
- **Opportunity to use Old Ranch Road ROW west of City Utility Tank area to Milam. Cross City utility property with trail or go around.**
- **City Parks is working on options for Open Space/trails north of Old Ranch Road.**
- **There are “pinch points” in the City where the opportunity for a meaningful native prairie buffer is minimal, but at least trail connections can still happen. (South Howells Road/ Pike Creek HS area, Cordera/Milam/ Union/Bradley Ranch areas).**
- **Opportunity to use Old Ranch Road ROW west of City Utility Tank area to Milam. Cross City utility property with the trail or go around.**

- **Wolf Ranch from the west border of the City Utilities Water Tank site east to Black Forest Road is a critical ungraded piece.**

- **East of Black Forest Road is currently all in County jurisdiction.**

**A trail connection for human use can be planned east of Black Forest Rd to Vollmer R and through Sterling Ranch, along Briargate - Stapleton Pkwy to connect with the County Sand Creek Area Regional Trail System. Cooperative accommodation among rural residential lot owners to enable antelope movement can be sought especially north of Briargate-Stapleton Alignment. This could include Eaglewing, Highland Park, the Johnson Conservation Easement (Palmer Land Trust and private owner), Eagle Rising/Jaynes property and Poco road residents to enable antelope movement, minimize obstructive fencing and conserve native prairie land cover.**

- **East of Vollmer there is currently an approved Sketch Plan (Sterling Ranch), a PUD (The Retreat) and a proposed Sketch Plan (The Ranch - Sept 24 BoCC) - all with Metro Districts, all with trails. Perimeter trails should be planned in a wide, ungraded buffer (minimum 100-200-feet), preferably against large urban lots (1 ac), or 2.5 or 5.0 ac rural residential lots.**

**Connections among these subdivisions is possible and should coordinate with Regional Trails. These areas might also be annexed to Colorado Springs soon - in which case the City would have jurisdiction and open space/trails/density adjustments could be made.**

- **Paint Brush Hills area has a major (300+ foot) Excel Power line easement which can remain open and which connects across other private lands to the east side of Pineries Open Space. POS connects at its north end to a trail in Woodlake and eventually to Regional Trail along Hodgen Road.**

- **The east side of Prairie Necklace can be included in 4-way Ranch Planning and could reach to the Elbert Highway, Homestead Regional Park, and Peyton area.**

**Trail connectivity within the City of Colorado Springs, within the County, among the City, County, other Municipalities, and the National Forest has been a planning goal in the Region for a very long time. The new *PlanCOS* Majestic Landscapes Framework with a “Ring the Springs” Trails network offers a great platform for implementation now**

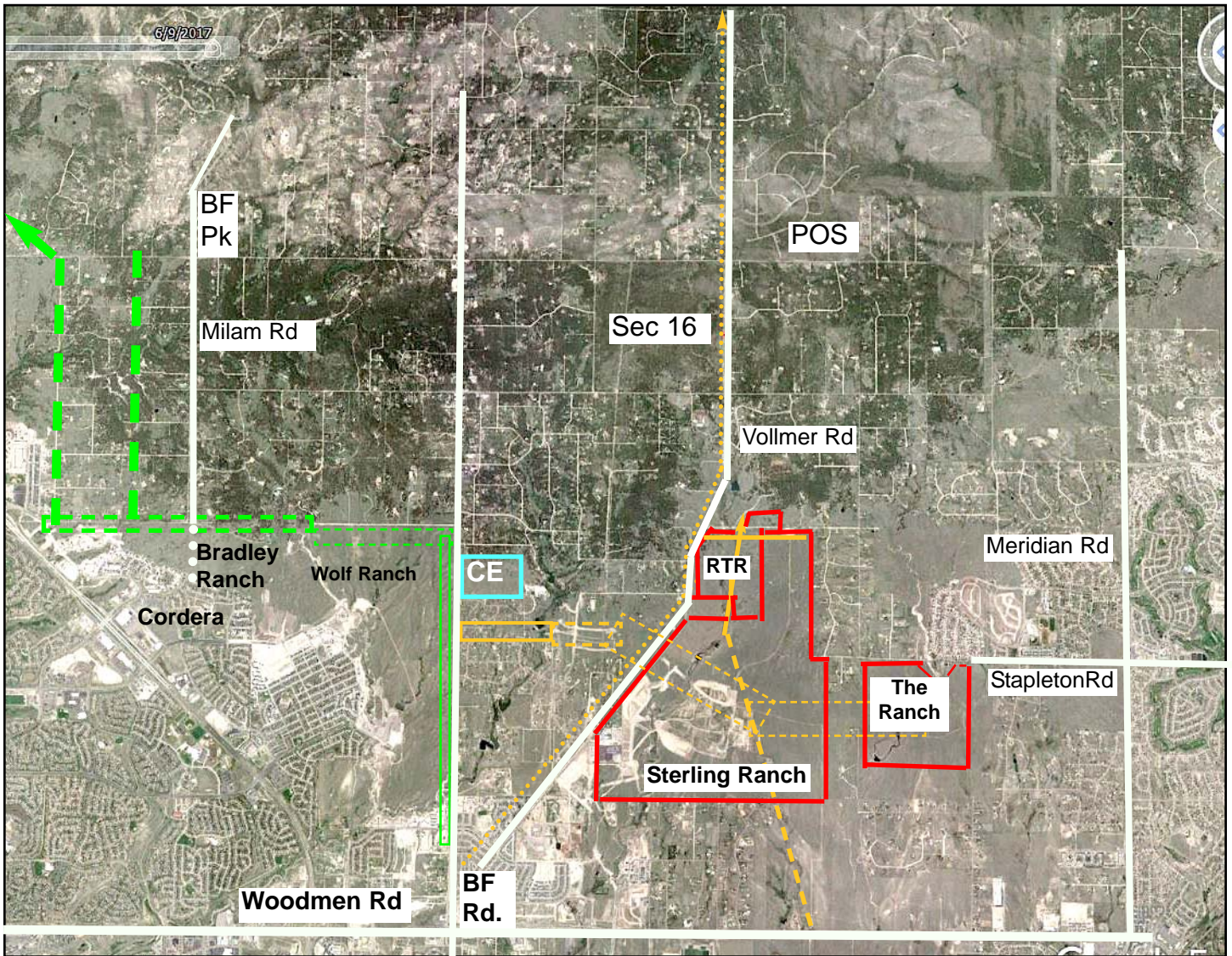
**The Prairie Necklace is a long-term project, but time is short in 2019-2020 to save key pieces in developing areas. City Parks is working on a plan for the area between Shoup and Old Ranch Roads. Wolf Ranch can still make adjustments to their recently amended Master Plan along Old Ranch and Black Forest Rds.**

**Connection of Briargate Parkway and Stapleton Road can include at least a trail (this area “buffered” so some extent by existing rural residential lots which have native prairie. Sterling Ranch, The Retreat, The Ranch and new projects can establish wider perimeter buffers and use existing utility easements.**

**If City and County Decision makers can agree on implementation of this concept as a joint GOAL then patches can be connected as development progresses and a Prairie Necklace can become a treasure.**










# Central - Eastern City Boundary



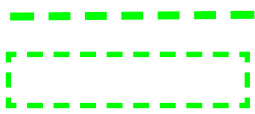
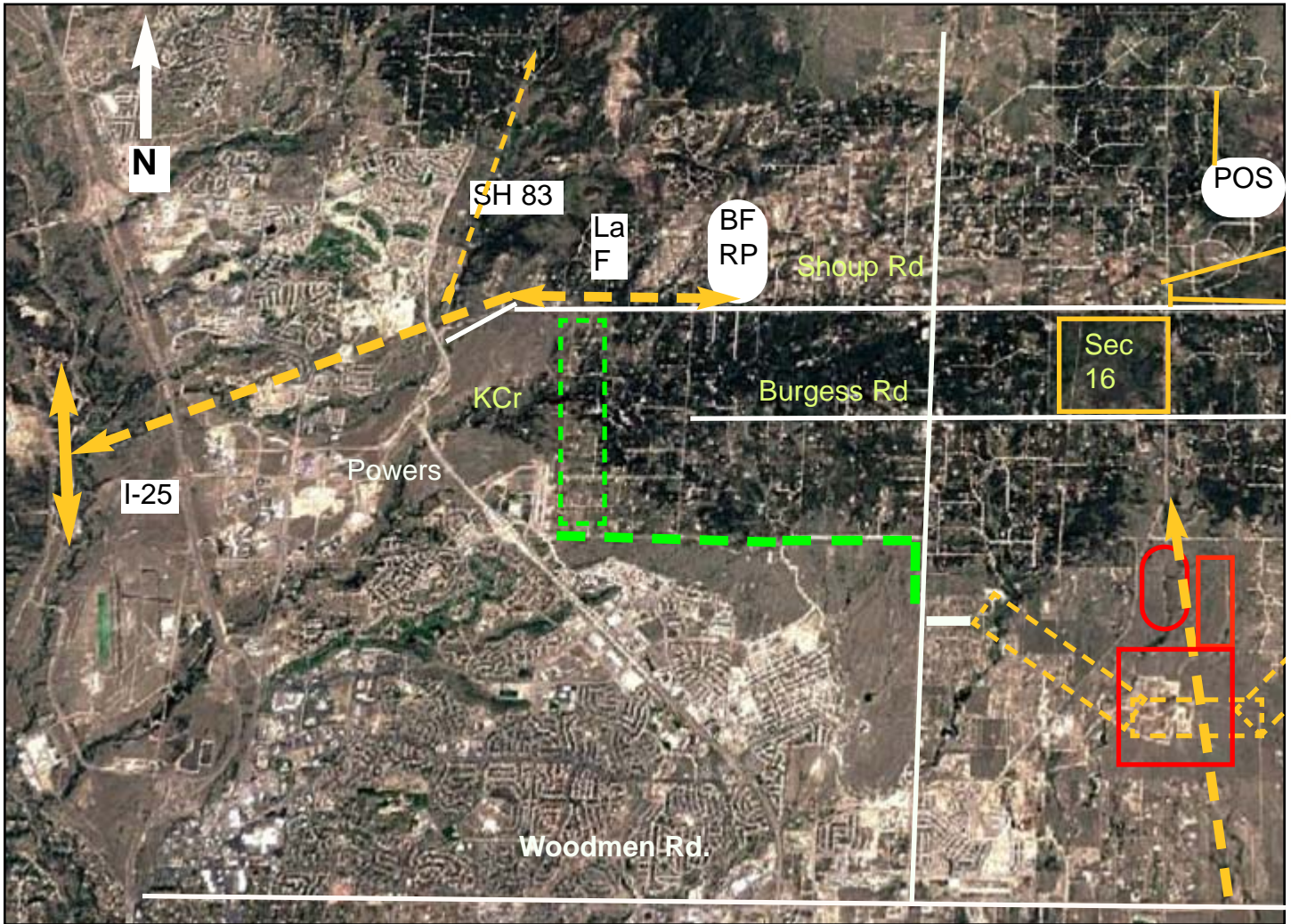
Colo  
Spgs

El Paso County

 Potential trail and/or  
buffer for Prairie  
Necklace in City

-  - Conservation Easement (CE) Pvt
-  - Sketch Plan, Recent PUD
-  - Bicycle Trail - Vollmer Rd
-  BG/ Stap - 2 lanes built
-  BG/Stap - Corridor - in planning
-  County Regional Built
-  County Regional Trail planned

# To the West



**Potential Buffer/Trail Areas  
in City**



**Solid line: Santa Fe Trail - Monument Creek; Sec 16 Trail; POS Trail  
Planned La Foret Trail - EPC Parks - Bridge built under SH83, Sand Crk trail**

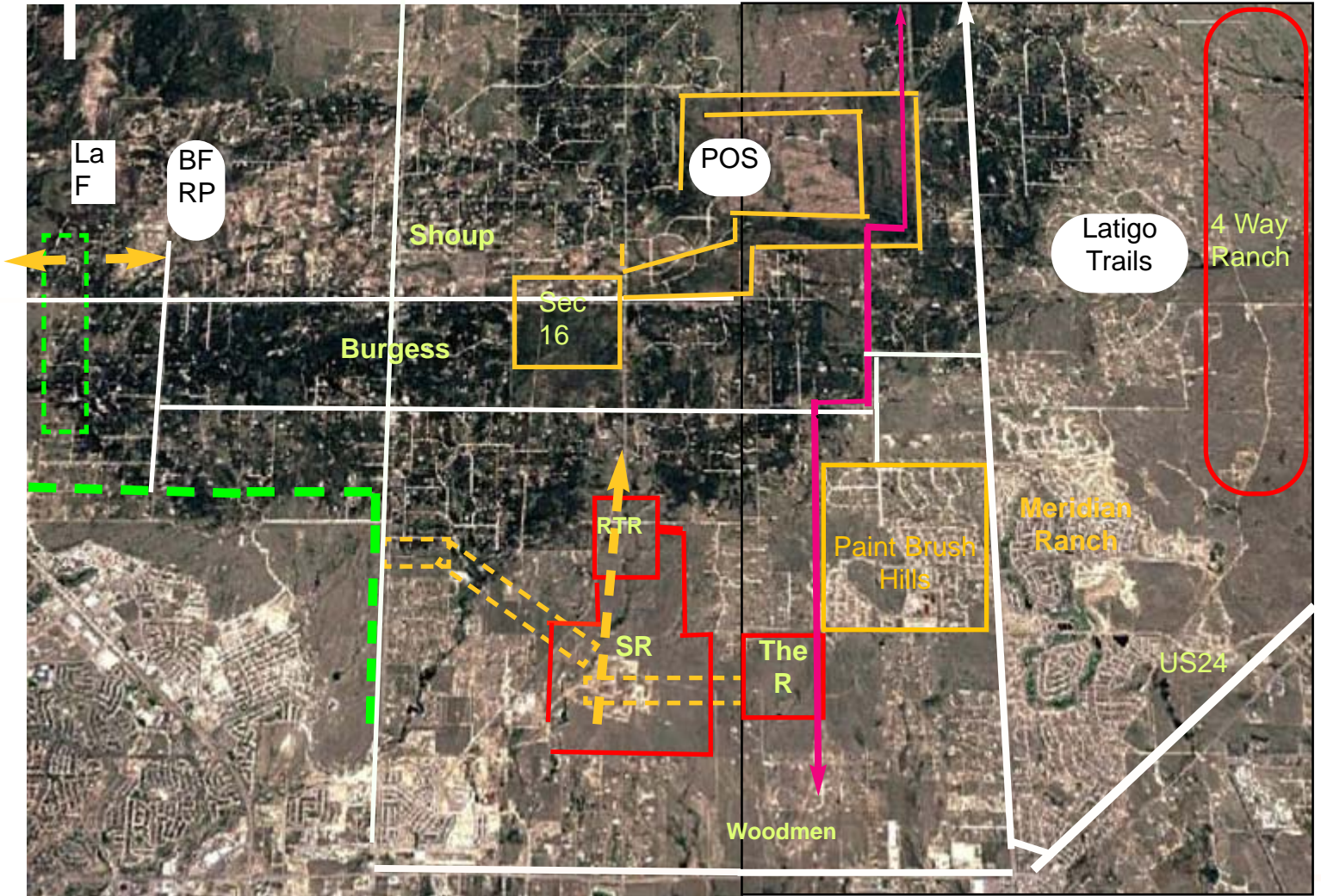


**Briargate/Stapleton Pkwy Alignment - could include trail**



**Sketch Plan Sterling Ranch (Skech Plan) and Retreat at Timber Ridge  
(PUD)**

# To the East



## MAP KEY



Potential Buffer/Trail Areas

in City



Solid line = Santa Fe Trail - Monument Creek; Sec 16 Trail in 300' buffer

Dashed line = Planned La Foret Trail - EPC Parks - Bridge built under SH83, Sand Crk trail



Briargate/Stapleton Pkwy Alignment - could include trail



Sketch Plan Sterling Ranch (Sketch Plan) and Retreat at Timber Ridge (PUD),  
The Ranch (Sketch plan to Bocc 9/24)

Excel Transmission Line 330' wide Utility easement

# Parks, Open Space and Biodiversity Planning

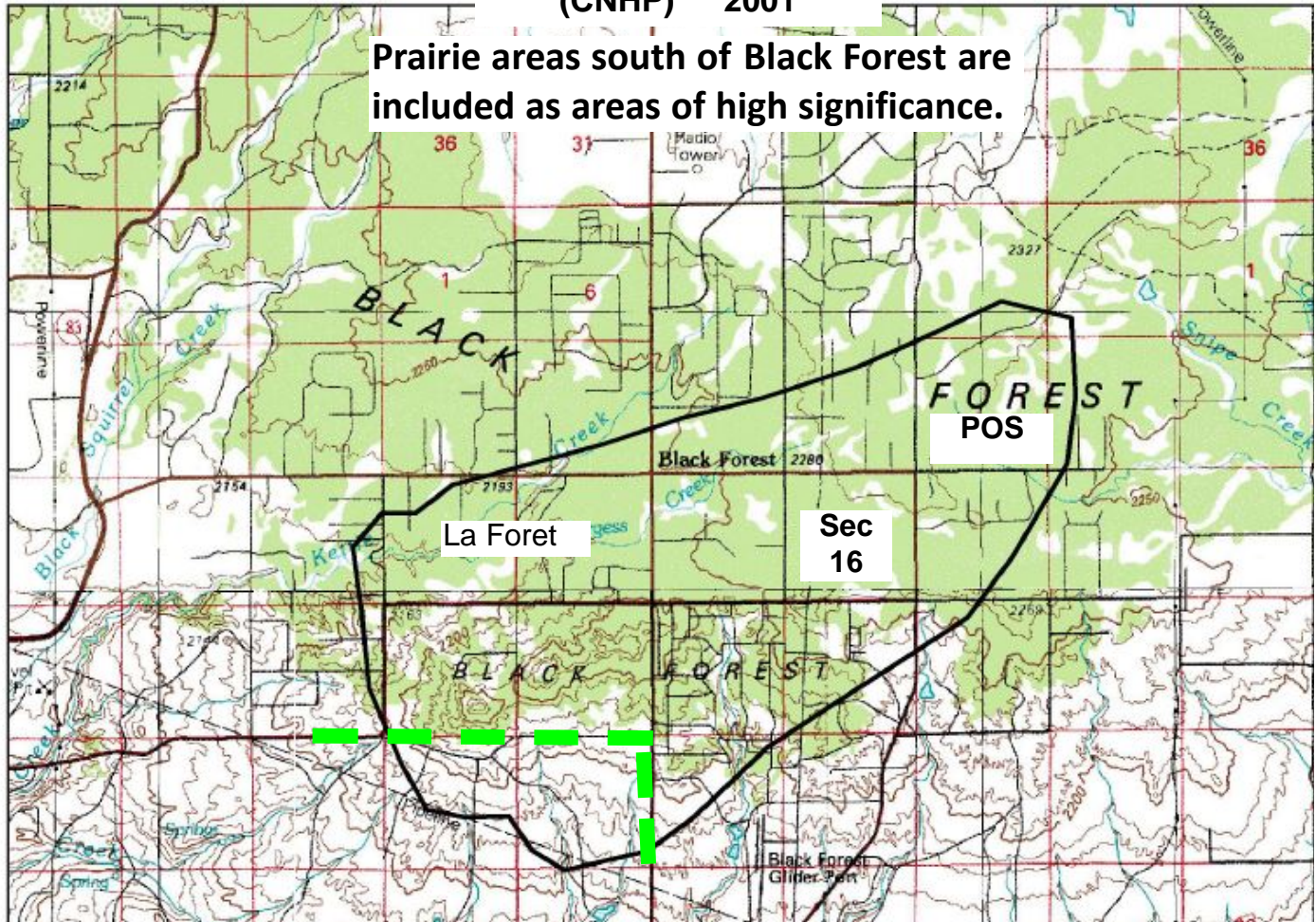
## **Black Forest**

### Potential Conservation Area

Colorado

Natural Heritage Prgrm

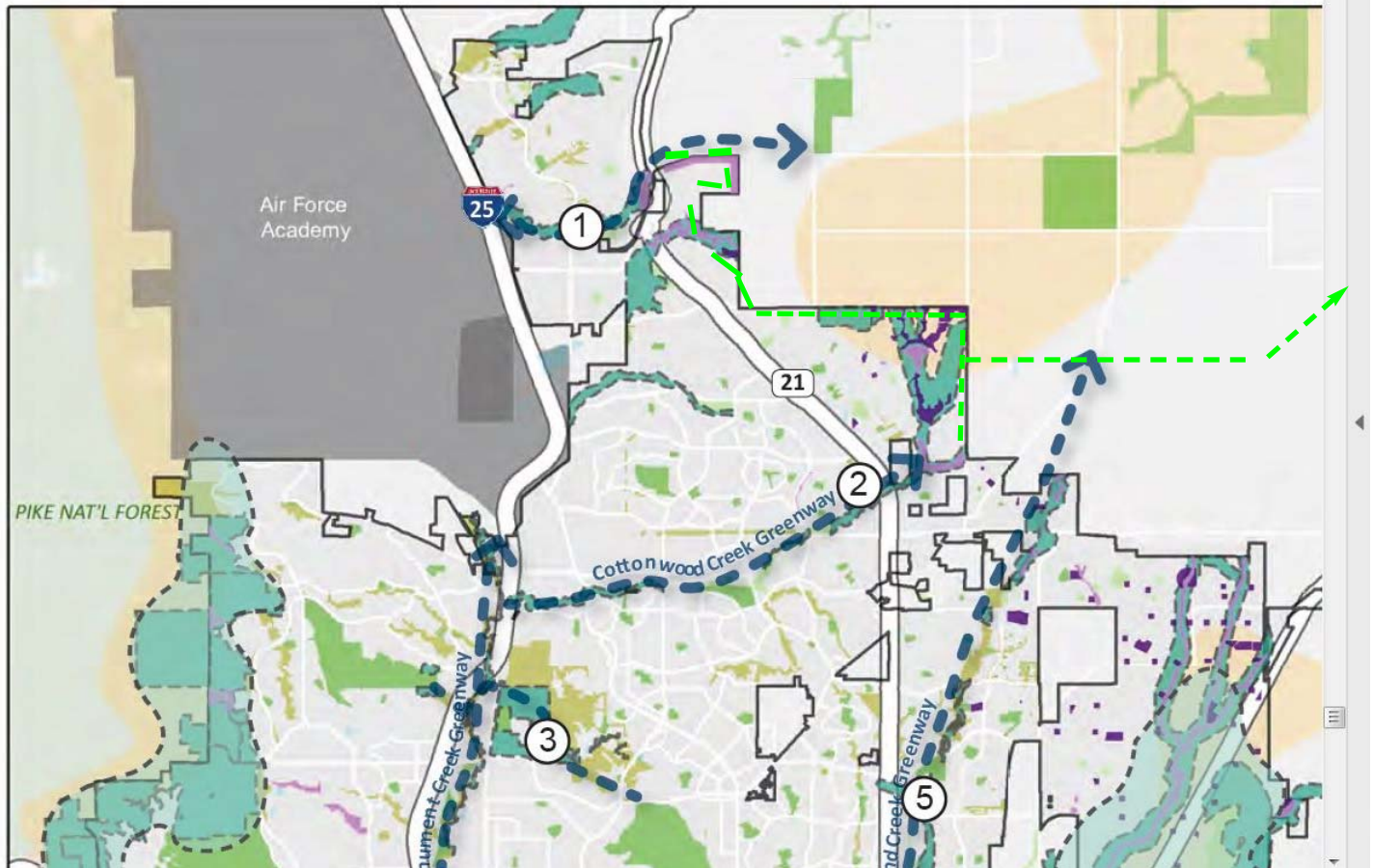
(CNHP) 2001



**PCA ( Black Forest Potential Conservation Area) - Significant Biological Diversity** Colorado Natural Heritage Program - **Survey of Critical Biological Resources (El Paso County, Dec. 2001. p. 159.** Prepared for EPC Parks and Leisure Services, Doyle et al.. 2001 Another PCA includes what is now the Pinerias Open Space in Black Forest and overlaps part of this PCA.

- **1999 - CNHP - Countywide biological survey - El Paso County / BoCC**
- **Goal - systematically identify the locations of rare species and significant natural plant communities in El Paso County, and identify and prioritize areas of critical habitat (Potential Conservation Areas - [PCAs].**
- **CNHP assists in conservation efforts and presenting the results of the study to county commissioners, county planning departments, and interested local groups.**
- **Majority of the funding was provided through a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) planning grant to El Paso County Parks and Leisure Services Department.**
- **Related study of wetland and riparian resources funded by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources was conducted simultaneously by CNHP (Doyle et al. 2001).**





- The tan polygon in the NE corner of this map, which includes Sec. 16 and the Pineries Open Space in the Black Forest, is based on the CNHP Map (previous page) prepared in 2001. It overlaps much of the proposed buffer/Trail along Black Forest Road in the 2019 Wolf Ranch proposed Amendment Area, and all of the area along Old Ranch Road.

- Note that **dark turquoise Candidate Open Space Areas** in the City of Colorado Springs Parks Master Plan follow the western tributaries of Cottonwood Creek and also include property west of Wolf Ranch. A **Future Master planned Park (purple) and open space (lavender)**, based on the Wolf Ranch Master Plan in effect in 2014, are also in this Parks Plan.

- Offsite, but along the City/County Boundary to the north are **Kettle Creek Canyon candidate open Space (turquoise and lavender) and Northgate Buffer along Howells and Shoup Roads**. The Northgate buffer connects to the La Foret Trail (County) and existing pedestrian Bridge built years ago under SH 83 when the Shoup/SH 83 intersection which was improved in the early 2000s.

- **The Prairie Necklace connections originating on Wolf Ranch west of Black Forest Road would connect areas (1) - Black Squirrel Creek Greenway- and (2) - Cottonwood Creek Greenway on this map.** • **The Prairie Necklace Connections east of Black Forest Road (in the County) would connect areas (1) and (2) to the Sand Creek Greenway (5).**



**PlanCOS spells out a vision for Colorado Springs based on themes:**

- Majestic Landscapes.**
  - Unique Places, and**
  - Strong Connections (which can include ecosystems and trails as well as roads and utilities)**
- These thematic attributes exist on both sides of the City Boundary and this proposal is an effort to maximize these great ideas for the Public Good.**

**This proposal, calls for implementation of the City's vision and partnering with similar vision and goals of the County. Prairie Necklace broadens it in current time to what is still possible to do in both the City and the County with the remaining open and ungraded prairie at the spectacular southern edge of the Black Forest and Great Plains.**

**It can mitigate many of the contentious issues between current urban subdivisions and long-time rural residential residents. It opens the door for positive cooperation.**

**This proposal gives developers a chance to give forward, and to also give back from previous decades of huge successes and create prime and more balanced land uses for the public good.**

**It opens the door for both immediate and longer term cooperative planning, coordination and creating a win-win for residents and the development community.**

**The prairies in El Paso County are very diverse, underlain by different geologic substrates of the last 80 million years. Native prairie lands special.**

**There is very little undeveloped/ungraded prairie land left in much of this potential Prairie Necklace - please give this immediate thought and consideration of how to implement this.**

**Thank you,**

***Dr. Judith von Ahlefeldt, PhD***

**Landscape Ecologist**

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**495-8750**

# **A Prairie Necklace**

## **Its Place in Time**

