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Presenter: Judy von Ahlefeldt, PhD, Landscape Ecologist

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Prairie Necklace

Presenter: Judy von Ahlefeldt, PhD, Landscape Ecologist

Summary

Dear Colorado Springs Planning Commissioners,

Thank you for your service on the City Planning Commission.

On Thursday, Sept. 19, 2019 I will be presenting an Informational Item entitled "A Prairie Necklace - A Place in Time", and will be encouraging you, as a Commission charged with planning, and implementation recommendations, to interact with the City Council, City Planners and the County Planning Commission and its Planners, to be a leader in what is perhaps the final opportunity to accomplish preservation and connection of prairie open spaces in the vicinity of the present Colorado Springs-El Paso County boundary near Black Forest. I will be presenting this to the County Planning Commission as an informational item on Tuesday, Sept. 17, 2019 at their regular meeting.

The Concept of a Prairie Necklace - is to connect presently planned Greenways across their bordering ridges using patches or corridors of remaining native prairie with a useable, nonpaved non-motorized trail for people. This would also connect to trails and other facilities in both the City (PlanCOS and City Parks Master Plan) and El Paso County (EPC County Parks Master Plan), across watersheds at or near the City County Boundary (between SH 83 and Black Forest Road) To the east the system could extend all the way to the Peyton/Homestead Park Area. This is a bold, big picture Concept that needs action very soon before any more of the remaining prairie disappears forever.

I think this could be done with a coordinated and united effort between the City and County to implement this Concept, with support from Developers, who stand to gain a lot of goodwill from this.

This concept was inspired by Google Earth satellite photos and enabled by my professional training

as a Landscape Ecologist after attending the Wolf Ranch Amendment First Public Meeting in January of 2019 at Legacy Elementary School.

When I was serving as Forest Ecologist on the Medicine Bow National Forest in the 1990s I proposed a similar idea for an "Old Growth Patch and Linkage System" (for the new Forest Plan) to preserve corridors of mature forest types (protected by no clearcutting) winding through the clearcut patches to provide travel corridors (linkages) for animals and birds requiring undisturbed old growth forest connecting valley bottoms, and also preserve genetic contiguity for groundcover plants.

The Prairie Necklace Concept is a patch and linkage system for patches of native prairie connected by linkages of native prairie using a modified corridor pattern, and has the added benefit of connecting to other trail linkages and parks or open space patches accessible from neighborhoods. It is a scaled down custom version of "The Emerald Necklace" systems of Cleveland and Boston. It benefits both people and ecosystems.

The Prairie Necklace concept was proposed in February, 2019, has been circulated to City and County Parks staff and planners, as well as to some elected officials in the City and County, local trails, open space, and conservation interests and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program at CSU.

Thank you for reading this. I look forward to explaining this unique opportunity in time (2019-2021?) to secure this approach in developing areas where prairies are being rapidly eradicated.

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