

CHERRY CREEK BASIN OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of the Plan

The Cherry Creek Basin Open Space Conservation and Stewardship Plan is the direct result of a Legacy Planning Grant awarded to the Trust for Public Land in cooperation with the City and County of Denver, Arapahoe County, Douglas County and other municipal, agency and public partners by the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund. Over the course of 14 months, the Cherry Creek Basin Steering Committee, made up of public and private stakeholders throughout the Basin, met monthly to develop the information and guidelines in this Plan.

Recognizing the inherent natural and recreational value of the Basin, in addition to the ongoing pressures of growth and development, one primary purpose of this effort has been to establish a cross-jurisdictional relationship among the various local jurisdictions in the Cherry Creek Basin. Through this partnership, a plan to guide the creation of an inter-connected open space and recreation system aimed at protecting key riparian, upland, and aquatic zones has been designed. The following is a summary of key goals for this basin:

- Create a vision for the future of parks and open space in the context of continued growth and development. This vision is dependent upon the multi-jurisdictional relationships and partnerships that have proven to be effective in the past.
- Develop recommendations for integrating stewardship and management policies of the key stakeholders. The goal is to achieve a consistent “look and feel” or identity in the Basin, and ensure long-term sustainable management of its resources.
- Establish a framework to leverage limited resources of multiple partners into land conservation and stewardship projects with maximum effect. The tools created in this Plan will assist the local jurisdictions to move specific projects forward.

This Plan is designed to serve as Basin plan and a strategic implementation tool for each jurisdiction. It is the culmination of numerous studies, public forums, and resource inventories. In addition, this project has taken significant steps toward understanding the water quality of Cherry Creek and the relationship of land conservation to water quality. With the assistance of ERO Resources and Muller Engineering, this project is able to provide information to help local governments, state and federal resource agencies, and other stakeholders plan and implement effective resource protection measures in the Basin. This work has also helped distinguish which lands would be strong candidates for conservation based on their ability to have a positive water quality impact.

Background

The key to implementation of any vision is cooperation and a sense of a common agenda. To that end, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) worked to involve the communities in the Basin at every step in the process. These discussions and interactions were critical to ensuring that the vision represented the various and diverse needs of all stakeholders.

It was also critical to understand the relationship of open space and park opportunities within the context of the growth and development projected for the Basin. The environmental health and sustainability of the Cherry Creek Basin is directly related to the various types of land use development. As rural land is converted to semi-urban and urban uses, the Basin experiences

negative impacts on sensitive plant species, wildlife habitat/diversity, scenic views, outdoor recreation and water quality.

Governments in the Cherry Creek Basin (state, county and local) have initiated efforts to protect land in the form of open space and provide recreation to their citizens in the form of parks. Generally, there is support at the county and municipal level for additional protection of parks and open space within the respective comprehensive and open space master plans. All of the counties and municipalities in the watershed are experiencing tremendous growth pressures and recognize the need to balance this with additional parks and open space. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the magnitude of population growth and the quantity of parks and open space being conserved. This disconnect is a result of limited funding resources, inadequate planning, and surging population growth. The Cherry Creek Basin Open Space Conservation Stewardship Plan has been developed to help communities strategically address these very issues.

Next Steps

The major theme throughout this Plan is the collaborative approach to protecting and enhancing the Cherry Creek Basin. The two discrete, yet complementary paths of land conservation and stewardship practices are necessary to achieving the vision for the Cherry Creek Basin. To that end, the Steering Committee has created a series of specific next steps designed to implement both a land conservation and integrated stewardship management strategy.

The Trust for Public Land is committed to assisting local jurisdictions to identify a number of specific land conservation opportunities within the Basin. Preserving land in the Basin is a powerful tool in achieving the vision of this Plan because it has the ability to protect wildlife corridors, unique vegetation communities, scenic views, water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase recreational opportunities. In addition, there are a multitude of new and innovative funding sources that can be used to leverage limited local dollars in order to achieve a greater vision.

While conserving open space is a crucial step toward protecting the Basin, it is equally important to consider sustainable, long-term stewardship practices. In the final Plan the Steering Committee created a set of guidelines for continued cooperation within the Basin. These goals and recommendations address the identity of the Basin and outline specific steps to protect this identity. Local citizens will also play a vital role in protecting the Basin and advocating stewardship of the land and water resources. Public involvement in new developments, new community parks, or new open space acquisitions will be necessary to carry this vision forward.

A key facilitator of both the public and broader stakeholder involvement in the implementation of the stewardship guidelines is the Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners. They are a broad-based group, which includes diverse interests within the Cherry Creek Basin, and are engaged in an ongoing effort to continue the regional dialogue as the only group with representatives from both the upper and lower portions of the Basin. The Partners share information and pursue opportunities for coordination and integration of projects that affect the value and benefits of Cherry Creek. As such, the Partners could provide the forum for the cooperative effort required to realize the vision for Cherry Creek.