

~ Homestead Ranch Regional Park ~ Master Plan

2022



~ El Paso County Community Services ~
Park Operations Division

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RESOLUTION NO. 22-415

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COUNTY OF EL PASO, STATE OF COLORADO**

**RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE
HOMESTEAD RANCH REGIONAL PARK MASTER PLAN**

WHEREAS, the El Paso County Parks Master Plan recommends development of site-specific master plans for County park properties and regular updates of existing plans to guide capital improvements, support third-party funding requests, and to continue to provide the facilities and services that citizens value; and

WHEREAS, the Park Operations Division of the Community Services Department initiated the development of a master plan for the development and management of Homestead Ranch Regional Park in late-2021; and

WHEREAS, the County used a multi-pronged planning process that included the collaboration of internal and external team members, letters to adjacent land owners, an on-site public hike, a dedicated project webpage, a four-week public master plan review; and

WHEREAS, the El Paso County Park Advisory Board endorsed the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan at their meeting on September 14, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for review and approval on November 29, 2022.

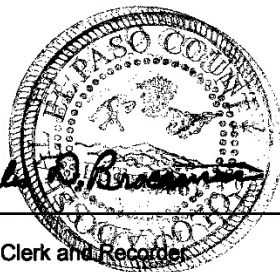
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of County Commissioners of El Paso County, Colorado, hereby approves the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan.

DONE THIS 29th DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2022 at Colorado Springs, Colorado.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
EL PASO COUNTY, COLORADO**

ATTEST:

By: 
County Clerk and Recorder



By: 
Stan VanderWerf, Chair

~ Acknowledgements ~

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Adam Baker – East District Supervisor

Dana Nordstrom – Community Outreach Coordinator

Nancy Prieve – Environmental Specialist

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CHAPTER 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Homestead Ranch Regional Park started with three isolated parcels totaling 74 acres via land dedication. An additional 380 acres were purchased by El Paso County Parks in 1987-1988. An additional 4 acres was added in 2003 via a land swap. Today the park consists of 458 acres located in the northeast portion of El Paso County, 6 miles northwest of Peyton, CO. The park is situated along the Palmer Divide on the eastern edge of the Black Forest. The park offers opportunities for hiking, biking, equestrian use, and outdoor education. The site includes a playground, restroom, fishing pond, picnic pavilions, a multi-use field, and 5 miles of trails.



Figure 1 – Fishing Pond at Homestead Ranch

Master Plan Purpose

The Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan is a guiding document whose purpose is to provide a sustainable approach to the allocation of resources for the next seven to ten years, and to document baseline information while outlining future improvements for the park. The Master Plan establishes goals based on input by Parks staff, stakeholders, the general public, and analysis of data. The Master Plan will guide El Paso County Park's efforts to continue to provide a high quality of recreation and educational services that are valued by citizens of all ages and abilities while protecting the natural environment.

El Paso County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the Rocky Mountain Region and is the most populous County in Colorado according to the 2020 US Census. The county has grown over 17% from 2010 to 2020. Along with growth comes more need for the preservation of open space and enhanced recreation opportunities. The Master Plan will be used by County Park staff and policy makers to guide the development of the park for years to come.

This Master Plan is intended to provide a vision for the future of Homestead Ranch Regional Park as a location for recreational opportunities while providing stewardship for the natural environment. It explores existing conditions and future needs from the vantage point of the public, stakeholders, and County staff and leaders to provide a roadmap for the future. This vision is further expressed through the following goals, action items, and implementation plan.

Planning Process

The Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan process began in the fall of 2021 with data gathering, literature review and establishment of draft master plan objectives. Spring of 2022 included internal and public outreach with El Paso County staff members from the Community Services Department (Park Operations, Cultural and Recreational Services, Community Outreach, Environmental Services). Further outreach included representatives from trails and open space organizations as well as the general public. The public was encouraged to review the draft Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan, and to participate in a public hike at Homestead Ranch Regional Park. Finally, a hearing is planned before the

Park Advisory Board and the Board of County Commissioners. The Master Plan project outline is shown in the figure below.

HOMESTEAD RANCH MASTER PLAN

PROJECT TIMELINE

TASK	2021			2022									
	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.
Stakeholder Interviews													
Data Gathering													
Develop Concept Alternatives													
Review Concept Alternatives													
Draft Master Plan Preparation													
Draft posted online for public review													
Finalize Master Plan for Public Hearings													
El Paso County Parks Advisory Board Presentation													
El Paso County Board of County Commissioners Presentation													

Figure 2 – Project Timeline

Summary of Master Plan Goals

The establishment of goals specific to the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan was based upon not only system-wide goals and objectives, but also a thorough analysis and understanding of the community preferences. The following goals have been established for this Master Plan, with primary goals shown in bold:

- **Conservation and Stewardship**
 - **Create a sustainable future for Homestead Ranch Regional Park with respect for social, conservation, historical, and environmental values.**
 - Protect and enhance the natural features of the site and wildlife habitat.
 - Identify future facilities with continued respect for the natural and historical environment.

- **Recreation**
 - **Provide high quality and safe experience for users of park facilities and recreation areas.**
 - Strive to meet the recreational and cultural needs of the citizens regardless of age, activity, or personal abilities.
 - Plan, maintain, and build a trail system that serves hikers, cyclists, and equestrians of all ages and abilities.
 - Maintain active use areas of the park including the fishing pond, playground, and field.

- **Historic Preservation and Education**
 - **Provide education with respect to the historic agricultural uses of the site and the unique geology of the site.**
 - Provide a variety of educational and interpretive opportunities.

- **Management and Administration**
 - **Assess existing maintenance standards**
 - Evaluate accessibility of the existing facilities and recreation amenities.
 - Consider erosion control and maintenance of the parking area.
 - Consider strategic land acquisitions adjacent to the park to protect additional natural resource and allow for expansion of recreation opportunities.
 - Evaluate current forest and management objectives in regard to tree, shrub, and natural grass health, control of noxious weeds and other invasive species, and wildfire fuels management.

- **Community Awareness**
 - **Promote environmental awareness and stewardship through healthy, active, outdoor opportunities.**
 - Promote local and regional connectivity between Homestead Ranch Regional Park and surrounding communities, including Peyton.
 - Provide information on park facilities, programs, and rules governing use.

- **Implementation and Funding**
 - **Design, build and establish an operational budget for facilities in a way that is sustainable.**
 - Allow for future expansion as appropriate, providing adequate maintenance and management, and adjusting the Master Plan and management actions, if needed, to respect resource values and meet the needs of citizens.

Summary of Recommendations

Based upon the Master Plan Goals list above, the following recommendations were developed:

Conservation and Stewardship – Conserve natural, scenic, open space, aesthetic, ecological, recreational, historic, and environmental characteristics of the park. While somewhat general in nature, these recommendations will help to guide the planning and construction of other more specific recommendations, such as trail networks and interpretive opportunities.

Recreation – Homestead Ranch Regional Park features a 5.3 mile loop trail system serving users of all ages and abilities and consisting of a combination of Tier I, and Tier III trails. Existing Tier I and III trails will be

surfaced. Tier IV single-track trails will be developed in the eastern part of the property to create a loop that connects to the top of the ridge.

The existing playground, restroom facility, fishing pond, picnic pavilions, multi-use field, and existing trails will be evaluated to maintain the quality park patrons are accustomed to.

Historic Preservation and Education – This corner of El Paso County has a rich history, from its natural features, to its indigenous people, and following western settlement. Recreational and educational programming will be developed that focus on both the natural and human history of the park and surrounding region.

Management and Administration – Responsible management and administration of Homestead Ranch Regional Park will ensure that the park remains financially and environmentally sustainable for years to come while meeting the recreational and educational needs of residents and visitors. Master Plan goals call for researching strategic land acquisitions, maintaining existing facilities, and the development of forestry, fire mitigation, and noxious weed management plans.

Community Awareness – Outreach programs provide awareness, sponsorship, fundraising, and volunteer opportunities to support programs and facility development of El Paso County parks, trails, open spaces, Nature Centers, and other facilities. Outreach services provides opportunities to benefit the community and improve the quality of life for County residents with volunteer opportunities such as Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail, Trail Ambassadors, Creek Week, and Friends Groups, as well as donation opportunities through such longstanding programs as Partners in the Park and the Trust for Community Parks.

Implementation and Funding – The prioritization and phasing of capital improvements for Homestead Ranch Regional Park, as expressed in the Implementation Plan in Chapter 8, was derived from input by the public, stakeholders, and Master Plan Team members, with endorsement by the Park Advisory Board

and approval by the Board of County Commissioners. The capital improvement budget gives consideration to new recreational amenities as well as maintenance needs, while considering available funding, benefit for cost, project complexity, and improvement urgency. Master Plan goals recommend generating and researching partnership opportunities and funding sources, such as grants, to assist with the planning, development, and implementation of new projects and programs.

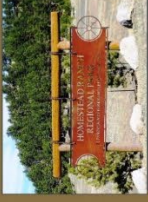


Figure 3 – Windmill and Watering Trough at Homestead Ranch Regional Park



EL PASO COUNTY PARKS

Located at the edge of Black Forest, this 450-acre regional park has diverse topography ranging from rolling, open meadows to tree-covered bluffs running the length of the park. A natural spring-fed pond and creek in the central valley of the park attracts deer, coyotes, foxes, fishing and over 25 types of waterfowl. The park also features a large playground, picnic pavilions, and playfield. Equestrian riders can water their horses at the trough while enjoying over four miles of trails throughout the park.



Location & Hours of Operation
 16444 Gollihar Road
 Peyton, CO 80831
Park Hours:
 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.
Reservation Season
 April - October
 Call (719) 620-7629

Driving Directions:
 Homestead Ranch Regional Park can be reached from Interstate 25, Exit 139 (Hwy 24) or Exit 149 (Woodmen Road).

From Woodmen turn left onto US-24 to Bradshaw Road, left on Bradshaw to Sweetwater, right in Gollihar Road and the park sign is on the right. From the Gollihar Road and the park sign is on the right, approximately 12-mile north to Park Entrance.



Homestead Ranch Regional Park



Hiking, Biking, & Horseback Trails



Playground and Picnic Area



Wonderful Views of the Front Range

Map 1 - Homestead Ranch Regional Park

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CHAPTER 2 – EXISTING CONDITIONS

Background and History

Homestead Ranch is made of several parcels of land. Outlying parcels which include the top of two buttes to the east and a 41 acre tract to the south were acquired in via the subdivision process in 1974. The main developed part of the park were purchased in 1987-1988. A property map is included in the list of maps at the end of this document. The land is on the edge of Black Forest and offers excellent hiking, biking, and environmental education opportunities. The park includes a playground, restroom facility, fishing pond, water features, picnic pavilions, and five miles of trails.



Figure 4 – Existing Park Sign

The site's modern history dates back to 1873 when the Holden family began ranching in the area of what is today Homestead Ranch Regional Park. The land that is today Homestead Ranch was acquired by Charles Cheese (Cleese) in 1897. Charles Cheese was the father of Gladys Persons who still lived adjacent to Homestead Ranch as late as 1988. Gladys Persons parents, the Cleese family operated a ranch that became as large as 2,160 acres in the area from 1897 to the 1950's (Homan, 1990). In 1974, El Paso County Parks acquired 3 lots totaling 74 acres of present-day Homestead Ranch Regional Park via the subdivision process. One of these lots includes Rattlesnake Butte and is connected to the main part of Homestead Ranch Regional Park. The other two parcels are not connected to the main portion of the park but are still considered part of the park even though they are undeveloped. In 1987-88, El Paso County began to acquire land for main part the park. 380 acres were purchased from John & Gladys Persons. In the early 2000's the park went into full development.

Pre-History:

10,000 BP – Paleo Indians inhabit Pikes Peak region

Ute, Comanche, Arapaho, Cheyenne and Kiowa tribes claimed land at one time or another

3,500 to 4,000 BP – Prehistoric sites dates to the Archaic period, projectile points

800 BP – charcoal pits indicate nomadic use of the area

Settlement:

1806 – Zebulon Pike expedition in the area

1820's – 1840's – Fur Trade era

1859 – Gold Rush

1862 – Homestead Act passed

1873 – Present day Homestead Ranch area settled by Stephen and Martha Holden

1897 – Martha Holden sells ranch to Charles Cheese (Cleese)

1900 – Eastonville population of 500, "potato capital of the world"

1922 – Tractors came into the area, first phone service at the ranch

c. 1930 – John Person marries Gladys Cleese. New generation at the ranch

1935 – Flood wipes out the railroad and multiple buildings in Eastonville, population begins to decline

1947 – 1957 John Person raised sheep at the ranch (Pals and Joyce, 1987)

1986 – 380 acre Person ranch listed for sale

Park developments:

1974 – County Parks acquires 3 parcels for future park land as part of Reata Filing No.1 in the vicinity of Homestead Ranch Park (71 acres)

1987-1988 – County Parks acquires the 380 acre Person ranch for future Regional Park

2004 - Restroom building, parking, and trails constructed

2005 - Fishing pond developed

2007 - Pavilions constructed

2014 - Wagon Wheel and Spur Trails developed

Methodology

An inventory of existing conditions was conducted as part of the planning process for Homestead Ranch Regional Park. The inventory extends the body of knowledge on which planning decisions can be based. The site inventory provides an understanding of how the land came to exist in its present state and condition, as well as the physical, biological, cultural, management, and social contexts in which it is situated. This information allows decisions to be made in ways that will protect the natural and cultural resources and preserve the conditions that make Homestead Ranch Regional Park unique and desirable as a public amenity.

The existing conditions inventory at Homestead Ranch Regional Park is classified into categories, based on physical, natural, and human aspects. Physical characteristics include climate, elevation, aspect, geology, soils and hydrography, while natural characteristics are centered on flora, fauna, habitats, and scenic resources. Lastly, human-based characteristics outline the surrounding land uses, wildfire, public service areas, and demographics of the surrounding region.

Topography and Landscape Type

Homestead Ranch Regional Park ranges approximately 250 feet in elevation, from 7,156' in the southeast corner, to the high point of 7,412' at the top of Rattlesnake Butte. The park's trails lead from the parking area to the top of the escarpment which is 7,350' in elevation after which the land levels off into a plateau. Homestead Ranch is unique because it sits on the Palmer Divide which separates drainage between the Platte River and the Arkansas River watershed. The area at the top of the escarpment ultimately drains into the South Platte watershed while the area south of the escarpment ultimately drains into the Arkansas watershed. The headwaters of the West Bijou Creek are located within the park on the northeast side of the property. The sub-watersheds of the Middle and Upper Brackett Creek begin on the south side of the park.

In general, the park consists of moderate slopes, and is commonly defined by the separation of below and above the escarpment that runs east to west across the property. The slope is steep along the wooded escarpment where the elevation rises from 7,200' to 7,350' over a distance of 400' making the grade roughly a 3:1 slope. Once on top of the escarpment there are grassy meadows and fewer trees, and the land is more of a plateau. Slope is mentioned in the Master Plan because it influences preservation, restoration methods, trail and trailhead locations, construction methods, and forest health management strategies.

The most predominate vegetative feature is the belt of Ponderosa Pine defined by the bluffs which traverse the park. This stand exists mainly as a result of the same high water table that occurs throughout the Black Forest. Typical shrubs found in the understory include mountain-mahogany, wax currant, snowberry, and juniper. Forbes and grasses are widespread in the understory as well.

The transition zone between Ponderosa Pine Forest and the grasslands to the north and south contain the most diverse vegetative species found on the property. Areas located outside this zone contain both warm and cool season grasses. A vegetation map is included in the list of maps at the end of this document.

Climate

El Paso County, Colorado is located in the Bsk Cold-Semi-Arid climate according to the Koppen Climate Classification (Kottek, 2006). This climate type is located in elevated portions of temperate zones. It is an intermediate between desert and humid climates.

The average amount of precipitation for the year is 18.0". The month with the most precipitation on average is July with 3.7" of precipitation. The month with the least precipitation on average is December with an average of 0.3". There are an average of 91 days of precipitation, with the most precipitation occurring in July with 14

days and the least precipitation occurring in January with 4 days. There is an average of 57.7" of snow. The month with the most snow is March, with 12.2" of snow. The warmest month on average is July with an average temperature of 75.3 degrees Fahrenheit. The coolest month is January which experiences an average temperature of 26.8 degrees Fahrenheit. (Weatherbase, 2021).



Figure 5 – Pavilion at Homestead Ranch Regional Park

- Average Annual Temperature: 50.6 degrees Fahrenheit
- Average Warmest Month: July
- Average Coolest Month: January
- Average Annual Total Snowfall: 57.7 inches
- Month with the Greatest Precipitation: July
- Month with the Least Precipitation: December
- Month with the Greatest Snowfall: March

Geologic Features and Soils

Geology— Homestead Ranch is located near the center of the Denver Basin. The Denver basin lies directly east of the Front Range and extends from SW Nebraska to Pueblo, CO. It is an area that was formed during the uplift of the Ancestral Rocky Mountains approximately 300 million years ago. The basin has since filled in with sediments. (US Geologic Survey, 2021). The Denver Basin is divided into different geologic formations. The upper formation of the Denver Basin is the Dawson Formation which formed which is exposed at Homestead Ranch Regional Park.

According to the USGS geology map for the Homestead Ranch Park, most of the park is comprised of the bedrock layer TKda5, which is the Dawson Formation. The Dawson Formation is bedrock that was laid down 65 – 55 mya. It was deposited in an environment characterized by braided streams emerging into the Denver Basin from the active Larimide range to the west. The formation is at least 900 feet thick in the Homestead Ranch area. The formation is characterized by alternating beds of sandstone, silt, and shale. Hardened capstone rock from the Dawson Formation can be seen at the top of the escarpment at in the park (Morgan and Barkman, 2012).



Figure 6 – Hardened Dawson Formation caprock within Homestead Ranch Regional Park

Another bedrock deposit found within the park is a 3-6 foot thick erosional remnant of Wall Mountain Tuff on the south end of Rattlesnake Butte. Wall Mountain Tuff is comprised of rock that originated from a volcanic outflow. The volcano is thought to have erupted in the west Arkansas River Valley between Buena Vista and Salida, CO 36.7 mya.

Other deposits within the park are broken into surface deposits and mass-wasting deposits. Surface deposits are defined as layers more than 5 feet thick. They are comprised of alluvial deposits of sand, silt, and gravel which have been transported and deposited downstream by flowing water. There are three different classifications of alluvial surface deposits within Homestead Ranch; Qa1, Qa2, and Qf2. These were all different alluvial deposits from the Holocene geologic era which is the last 11,600 years or after the last ice age. Alluvial deposits in the Homestead Ranch area are predominantly composed of quartz and feldspar fragments which came from materials in the Dawson Formation. The thickness of alluvial deposits vary by location but are believed to be about 50 feet thick above the Dawson Formation according to samples taken from wells in the Eastonville Quadrangle area (Morgan and Beckman, 2012).

In addition to the Holocene-age alluvial deposits, there is an area of Gravel of Palmer Divide (QPg) surface deposit within Homestead Ranch Park. The Gravel of Palmer Divide dates from the late Pliocene epoch which is over 1.5 mya. This deposit is in the NW corner of the park. It is characterized by light brown, pinkish brown, to reddish brown fine to coarse sand interbedded with gray pebble and cobble gravel. This unit is channelized into the underlying Dawson formation and may be stained with iron oxides. The thickness of the deposit is approximately 40 feet.

Mass-wasting deposits are earth materials that have been transported downslope by gravity. There is a geologic unit within Homestead Ranch, Qc which is an area of colluvial deposits. These deposits are located at the base of the escarpment. They are composed of loose, unconsolidated sediments. They may be boulder-sized rock fragments. Blocks may reach tens of feet in diameter. The layer could exceed 25 feet in thickness. Precipitation events and freeze-thaw processes may trigger rock fall in this area (Morgan and Beckman, 2012). A geology map is included in the list of maps at the end of this document.

Soils – The Soil Survey of El Paso County Colorado from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was reviewed (NRCS, 2020). Four major soil types were found on the main part of the Homestead Ranch Regional Park property. Brussett loam, 3-5% slopes (15) is found on the north part of the park on the grassy plains. Peyton-Pring complex, 3-8% (68) slope is found on the relatively flat part of the property above of the escarpment. The Kettle-Rock outcrop complex, 8-40% slope (42) is found along the hilly escarpment part of the property and Rattlesnake Butte. Peyton-Pring complex, 8-15% slope (69) is on the south part of the park. A map showing soils is included in the list of maps at the end of this document.

The Brussett loam (15) on the north part of the park is a loam soil. It is well drained with low runoff. It has no frequency of flooding or ponding. The soil's parent material is arkosic alluvium derived from sedimentary rock. Its soil profile includes an 8" deep A horizon of loam which transitions down to a silt loam from 26 to 60 inches below the surface. Loam soils generally contain more nutrients, moisture, and humus than sandy soils. This soil is considered prime farmland if irrigated.

The Peyton-Pring complex, 3-8% slope above the escarpment (68) is a sandy loam soil. It is well drained with low runoff. It has no frequency of flooding or ponding. The soil's parent material is arkosic alluvium derived from sedimentary rock. Its soil profile includes an A, B, and C horizon of sandy loam down to 60" deep. This soil type is not considered prime farmland.

The Kettle-Rock outcrop complex (42), has slopes of 8-40%. It is located along the escarpment in the steep sloped central part of the park. It is somewhat excessively drained. It has no frequency of flooding or ponding. The outcrop's parent material is sandy alluvium derived from arkose. Arkose is a coarse sandstone containing at least 25% feldspar. The profile of the outcrop includes up to 60" deep of gravelly loam sand with exposed sections of unweathered bedrock. This soil type is not considered prime farmland but it is presently forested.

The Peyton-Pring complex, 8-15% slope in the south part of the park (69) is a sandy loam soil. It is well drained with medium runoff. It has no frequency of flooding or ponding. The soil's parent material is arkosic alluvium derived from sedimentary rock. Its soil profile includes an A, B, and C horizon of sandy loam down to 60" deep. This soil type is not considered prime farmland (NRCS, 2020).

Hydrography

Homestead Ranch Regional Park straddles the Palmer Divide, an upland that separates the South Platte River the Arkansas River watershed. A map showing the watersheds is included in the list of maps at the end of this document.

The part of the park from the top of the escarpment to the north is a part of the South Platte River watershed. It includes the headwaters of the West Bijou Creek which eventually connects to the South Platte River in Fort Morgan, CO. The south part of the park below the escarpment is a part of the Arkansas River watershed.

The fishing pond in the middle of the park was constructed in 2005 as part of initial park development. The pond is 410' x 240' and has an area of 77,400 sq.ft. It is lined with a PVC liner that is sloped at 2:1. There is a natural spring in the area but it is diverted under the pond into an existing wetland area. The pond is fed directly from a Denver aquifer well and retains no native water. Water from the pond is pumped out and used for irrigation and then refilled with well water.

Forest and Vegetation

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed Ecoregions of the US where the quality, type, and quantity of environmental resources are similar. There are different levels of Ecoregions from I to IV. Level I Ecoregions are more general in nature down to the more detailed Level IV Ecoregions. Homestead Ranch Regional Park is a part of the Southwestern Tableland Level III Ecoregion. This region is between the High Plains and the Southern Rockies. It covers parts of southeastern Colorado, eastern New Mexico, the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, with a small area in southwest Kansas. The ecoregion has a dry mid-latitude steppe climate, marked by hot summers and cool winters (EPA, 2021).

The Level III Southwestern Tablelands Ecosystem is divided into seven types. Homestead Ranch straddles two of these types: The Pine-Oak Woodlands (26i) and the Foothill Grasslands (26j). The park shares characteristics of each. The lower part of the park and the top of the escarpment is a foothill grassland characterized by shortgrass and midgrass prairie. The escarpment is wooded and is dominated by Ponderosa Pines.

Foothill Grassland Ecosystem. The Foothill Grasslands Ecosystem extend from the north half of El Paso County, CO and into Elbert County, CO to the north. It is an area of dissected and irregular plains. This Ecosystem's grass varieties include: Yellow Indiangrass, big and little bluestem, switchgrass, fescues, varieties of wheatgrass, and sideoats grama.

Wildflowers in this ecosystem include Dotted Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*), Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja miniata*), Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Black Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Prairie Rose (*Rosa arkansana*), and Prairie Goldenrod (*Solidago missouriensis*).

Pine-Oak Woodlands. Found along the central ridge of the property, this community is dominated by ponderosa pine with some scrub oak on the edges and a scattered understory of yucca, and occasional patches of mountain mahogany. The sparse understory includes grasses such as slender wheat grass and fringed brome. The larger trees are commonly 8-12" diameter at breast height (DBH). Regeneration is present but variable, and typically dominated by ponderosa pine. Dense thickets of small diameter ponderosa pines are present, especially on the margin of the forest. There is no evidence of historic fire.

Noxious Weeds. Noxious weeds are of importance since severe infestations can adversely impact the vegetation within the park and



Figure 7 – Prairie Blazing Star above the escarpment in Homestead Ranch Regional Park



Figure 8 - Stand of Ponderosa Pine in Homestead Ranch Regional Park

spread to adjacent properties. Noxious weeds that have been observed and treated on the property include: Canada thistle, musk thistle, yellow toadflax, diffuse knapweed, common mullein and common St. Johnswort. El Paso County Environmental Services treated for noxious weeds in 2021 and will continue managing noxious weeds to help improve ecosystem health and wildlife habitat resources on the property.

Wildlife

There are no federally protected endangered or threatened species located within Homestead Ranch Regional Park. This also includes the Prebele's Jumping Mouse habitat and the Mexican Spotted Owl. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife's 'Species Activity' mapping, the property is in the overall range for numerous species of bats, black bear, mountain lions, pronghorn, mule, and white-tailed deer. The Swift Fox is listed in Colorado as a species of Special Concern and its range overlaps Homestead Ranch. The following is a list of wildlife that may be encountered at the park:



Figure 9 – Mule Deer at Homestead Park

Mammals:

Overall Range

- Big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*)
- Fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*)
- Hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*)
- Little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*)
- Silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*)
- Western red bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*)
- Black bear (*Ursus americanus*)
- Mountain lion (*Puma concolor*)
- Olive-backed pocket mouse (*Perognathus fasciatus*)
- Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*)
- White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
- White-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*)
- Abert's squirrel (*Sciurus aberti*) – eastern portion of park is in the overall range
- Elk (*Cervus canadensis*) – northeast three-quarters of park is in overall range
- Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – concentration area and overall range

Birds:

Breeding Range

- Band-tailed pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*)
- Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*)
- Burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) (no burrowing owl habitat if there aren't any prairie dogs)
- Cassin's sparrow (*Peucaea cassinii*)
- Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
- Grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)

- Lark bunting (*Calamospiza melanocorys*)
- Lazuli bunting (*Passerina amoena*)
- Northern harrier (*Circus hudsonius*)
- Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)
- Swainson’s hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)

Migration Range

- Rufous hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)

Reptiles:

Overall Range

- Bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*)
- Common lesser earless lizard (*Holbrookia maculate*)
- Greater short-horned lizard (*Phrynosoma hernadesi*)
- Many-lined skink (*Plestiodon multivirgatus*)
- Milksnake (*Lampropeltis elapsoides*)
- Ornate box turtle (*Terrapene ornata ornata*)
- Painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*)
- Plains garter snake (*Thamnophis radix*)
- Prairie lizard (*Sceloporus consobrinus*)
- Plateau fence lizard (*Sceloporus tristichus*)
- Prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*)
- Six-lined racerunner (*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*)
- Terrestrial garter snake (*Thamnophis elegance*)

Management of wildlife and wildlife habitat resources on the property should be integrated into management decisions to promote a healthy ecosystem.

Scenic Resources

Scenic resources, as defined by Scenic America, are “the visual attributes of landscape that include features having natural, cultural, social, historic, archaeological, and recreational significance; and views that are distinctly characteristic of a region” (Byers & Ponte 2005).

The location of Homestead Ranch Regional Park, high on the slopes of the Palmer Divide, affords the visitor sweeping views of the eastern plains and the Pikes Peak Massif and Rampart Range in the distance.



Figure 10 – View from the overlook at Homestead Ranch Regional Park

There are two existing overlooks in the park. Both overlooks are at the top of the escarpment just off the Rattlesnake Trail looking toward the southwest as shown in figure 10. The forested

hillside of Ponderosa Pines lies in contrast with the grassy plains. The Front Range including Pikes Peak can be seen on the horizon line to the west. The overlooks at the top of the escarpment looking SW are at an elevation of approximately 7390' which is 150' higher than the base of the escarpment.

There are currently no scenic overlook points developed along the Homestead Ranch Trail on the western part of the park, perhaps because this side faces southeast and would not be as good for viewing the Front Range. A potentially good place for a scenic overlook would be from the top of Rattlesnake Butte. Rattlesnake Butte is part of Homestead Ranch but it lies across Golihar Road to the SE of the main part of the park. The base of the butte is at an elevation of 7,160' at Golihar Rd. and rises to an elevation of 7,412' at the top of the butte, giving the butte a prominence of 252', which is 100' more prominent than the top of the escarpment in the main part of the park.

Wildfire Management

The Colorado State Forest Service produces a Wildfire Risk map for the state which estimates the risk of wildfires based upon several variables such as housing density, forest assets, and drinking water assets. Wildfire risk on the Homestead Ranch property varies depending on vegetation and terrain. The more developed area of the park area is estimated to have a low wildfire risk, while the eastern and southern portions of the park have a moderate wildfire risk. While the overall park has a low to moderate wildfire risk, the Ponderosa Pine ridgeline has the potential for high intensity fires that would be difficult to suppress due to the terrain. Flames could reach 12'-25' high along the ridgeline. The grasslands above and below the ridge would have a more moderate fire intensity with flames reaching 1'-4' high. (Colorado State Forest Service, 2021). A fire suppression difficulty map developed by the Colorado State Forest Service can be found in the appendix.

In the summer of 2021, a wildfire known as the "Birdseye Fire" occurred 2 miles north of Homestead Ranch Regional Park. The fire burned just over 21 acres after sparking in a home on October 8, 2021.



Figure 11 – 2021 Birdseye Fire, 2 miles north of Homestead Park

The cause of the fire is unknown. One house was destroyed, and a second structure was partially damaged. Figure 11 shows the fire in terrain similar to Homestead Ranch, a reminder of the importance of fire mitigation and very real possibility of fire in the area.

County Parks is currently implementing a Forestry Management Plan for Homestead Ranch Regional Park. Objectives of the plan include improved forest health and fire resistance by selective thinning, removal of ladder fuels, and dwarf mistletoe mitigation. Smaller diameter trees will be removed in order to promote old-growth characteristics. Forestry management at the park is beginning in fall 2022. The work is planned to be completed in phases. See map below.

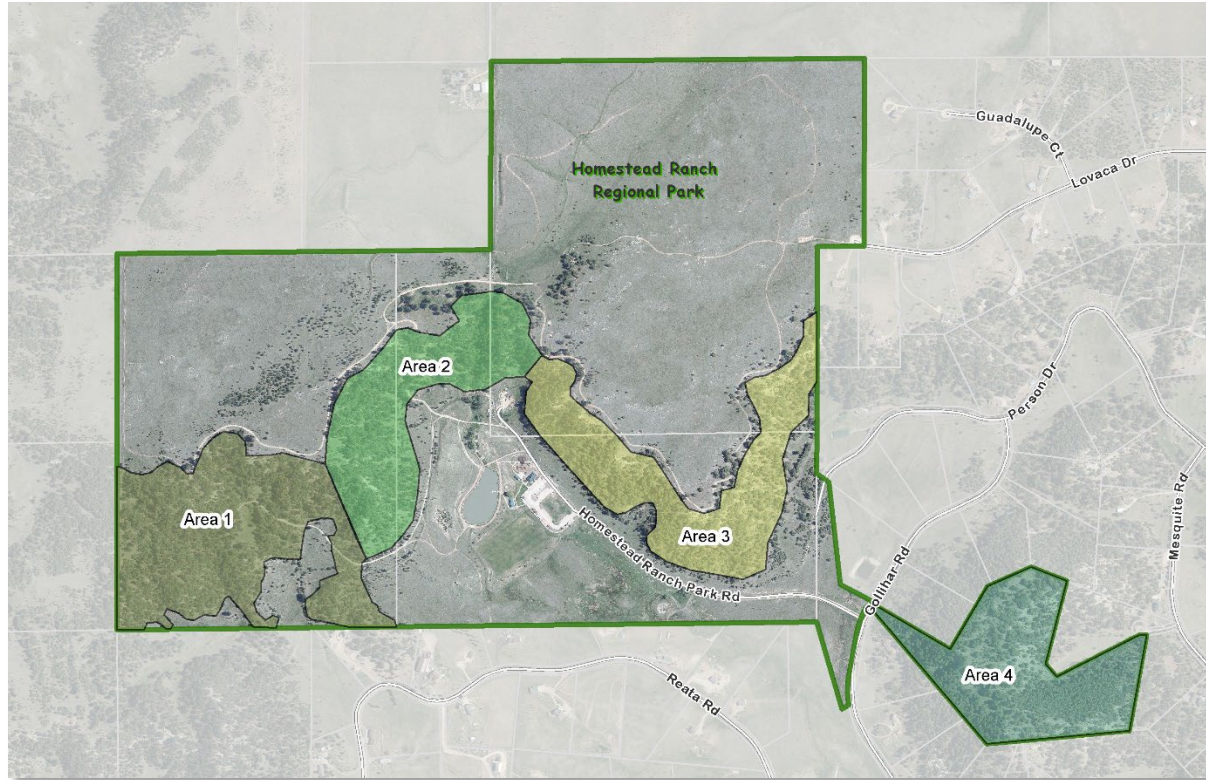


Figure 12 – Forestry Management Phasing

Surrounding Land Use and Park Service Areas

Homestead Ranch Regional Park is located in the NE part of El Paso County in an area characterized by relatively low population density with surrounding land uses being agricultural and rural residential. The unincorporated community of Peyton is 4 miles to the southeast, while the more densely populated community of Falcon is 15 miles to the southwest. The City of Colorado Springs is 30 miles to the southwest.

Homestead Ranch is classified as a Regional Park as it is over 450 acres in size and offers a variety of active and passive uses. Regional parks are typically larger than 200 acres and they have a combination of active uses. Homestead Ranch offers both active and passive uses such as a playground and athletic fields, pavilions, a fishing pond, and over 5 miles of trails.

Based on a park users presumed willingness to travel to a facility, the 2022 El Paso County Parks Master Plan established service areas for each type of park facility, including regional and neighborhood parks, in an effort to determine gaps in available park services for El Paso County residents. Local access to parks was measured with a 5-mile radius for neighborhood parks, while regional access was measured with a 15-mile radius for regional parks.

Residents of the nearby towns of Peyton, Calhan, and the Falcon area may visit the open space for daily exercise, to include hiking, mountain biking, and dog walking, while outlying populations may travel greater distances for the same type of activities, albeit as a regional destination rather than a local amenity.

Demographics

El Paso County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the Rocky Mountain Region and as of 2020 was the most populous County in Colorado at a population of 730,395 which was 14,873 more people than Denver County (US Census, 2020). El Paso County’s population is concentrated along the Interstate-25 corridor, with approximately 70 percent of all County residents living in the Colorado Springs Metropolitan area.

El Paso County’s population has been growing steadily over time. Since 1940 the county’s population has increased an average of 74,200 people every decade. According to the county’s 2021 Master Plan, the county’s population is expected to grow by 256,000 people by the year 2050 (Your El Paso Master Plan, 2021). Using the 5- and 15-mile radii criteria, staff analyzed the demographics and land use to provide a better understanding of the population and area that the park serves. The 5 and 15 mile buffers are shown in the figure below.

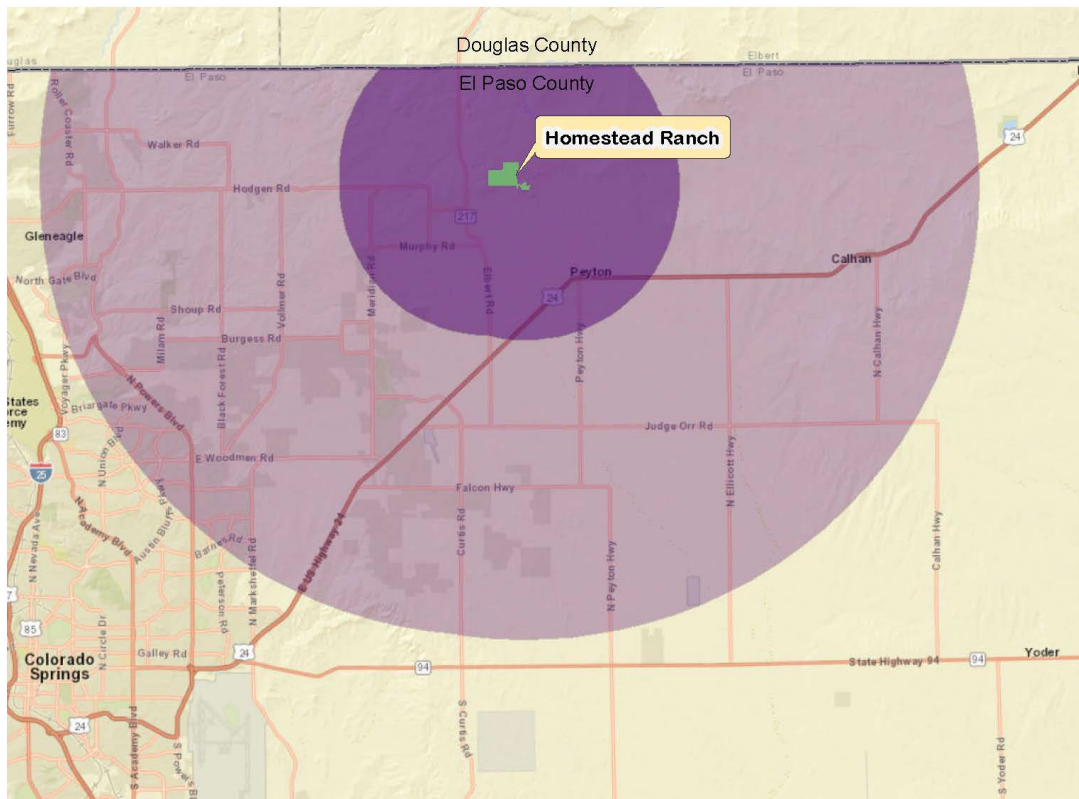


Figure 13 – Homestead Ranch 5 and 15 mile buffers (ESRI, 2021)

Population. In 2020, the estimated population of El Paso County was 730,395, having seen a growth of 17.5% since 2010, when the population was 622,263. The 5-mile buffer area showed a 2010 population

of 5,173 and a projected 2020 population of 5,625 for an increase of 8.7%. During the same time period, the 15-mile service area of Homestead Ranch Regional Park, which includes the northern east side of Colorado Springs, Falcon, and the towns of Peyton and Calhan, increased at a high rate of 31.0% from 123,279 to 178,797. Much of this growth is along the East Woodmen Road corridor and along Meridian Road in the Falcon area. This area is shown as a predicted 'Area of Change' in the 2021 El Paso County Master Plan. New suburban development is expected to continue north of Woodmen Road and east along Highway 24 from Falcon to Peyton. This area is within Homestead Ranch's 5 and 15 mile buffer area.

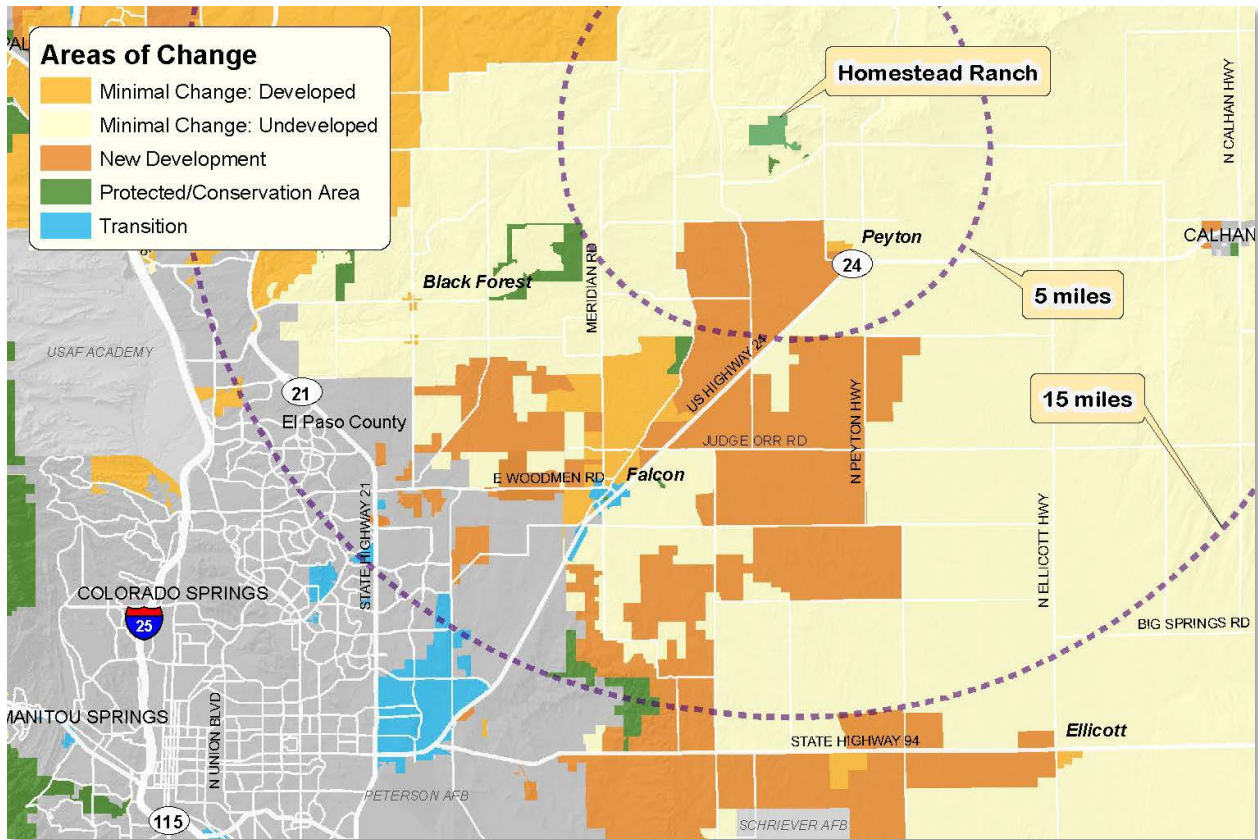


Figure 14 – Areas of Change (You El Paso County Master Plan, 2020)

Households and Housing Units. In 2020, El Paso County had 276,946 households with an average household size of 2.67 persons. The Homestead Ranch 15-mile service area had 57,827 households in 2020, with an average of 3.09 persons per household, while the 5-mile service area had 2,000 households averaging 2.81 persons per household. The 15-mile service area has not only seen a larger rate of population increase over the last 10 years; its household size is significantly larger than that of El Paso County as a whole.

In 2019, El Paso County had an estimated 280,718 housing units – an increase of 10.8% from 2010, which saw 253,379 units. During the 2010-2019 time period, the housing units in the 15-mile service area increased at much higher rate of 21.2% from 60,659 to 73,504. In the 5-mile service area, housing units increased at an even higher rate of 25.9% from 7,295 to 9,188, possibly due to the aforementioned increased rates of housing development in the Monument area, particularly near the I-25 corridor.

Median Household Income. In 2021, the median household income of El Paso County was \$72,923, while the 2021 estimate for the 5-mile service area was significantly higher at \$101,815. The estimated 2021 15-mile service area median household income was also higher at \$103,736.

Educational Attainment. In 2019, 23.5% of El Paso County residents age 25+ held a bachelor's degree. In the same year, 28.9% of residents age 25+ in the 15 mile buffer held a bachelor's degree while 30.1% of residents in the 15 mile buffer held a bachelor's degree making the study area more educated than El Paso County as a whole.

Median Age. In 2021, the estimated median age for El Paso County residents was 36.2 which is two years lower than the median US age of 38.3 for the same year. The 15 mile buffer area had a slightly higher median age than the county at 36.7. The 5 mile buffer area had the oldest median age at 43.7, more than five years over the national median age and 7.5 years over the county median age for the same year (ESRI, 2021).

Conclusion. The El Paso County Parks Master Plan and the census data anticipate population growth greater than the state average in the Homestead Ranch Regional Park vicinity. This is especially true of the 15 mile buffer which had a population increase of 31% over the past decade. The data shows an educational attainment that is 5-6% higher than El Paso County as a whole in the study area. The age of the study area around Homestead Ranch is also higher than the county as a whole, especially within the 5-mile buffer where the average age was 43.7 vs. 36.2 in greater El Paso County. The park amenities and level of service should be tailored to serve the changing demographics and growing population in the northeast part of the County.

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CHAPTER 3 – PUBLIC OUTREACH AND INPUT

Introduction

When developing Master Plans, El Paso County Parks is committed to encouraging a broad spectrum of County stakeholders to participate in an open and transparent public involvement process. This process is designed to provide citizens and organizations information about the purpose of Master Plan development and ultimately, the recommended improvements to their parks, trails, and open space.

Input Compilation

El Paso County Parks seeks to incorporate input from the public on its master plans. Public input may occur through on-site visits, public and stakeholder review of the draft Master Plan, and through Park Advisory Board and Board of County Commissioner public meetings. By soliciting comments, suggestions, and solutions to problems, County Staff is able to identify reoccurring themes, generate a spectrum of goals and recommendations, and prioritize proposed improvements. Staff undertook a technical analysis of the physical attributes of the site so that any improvements would be evaluated with respect to their impact on the surrounding environment. The planning process provides a means of synthesizing technical information, combined with the needs and desires expressed by the public as illustrated in the figure above.

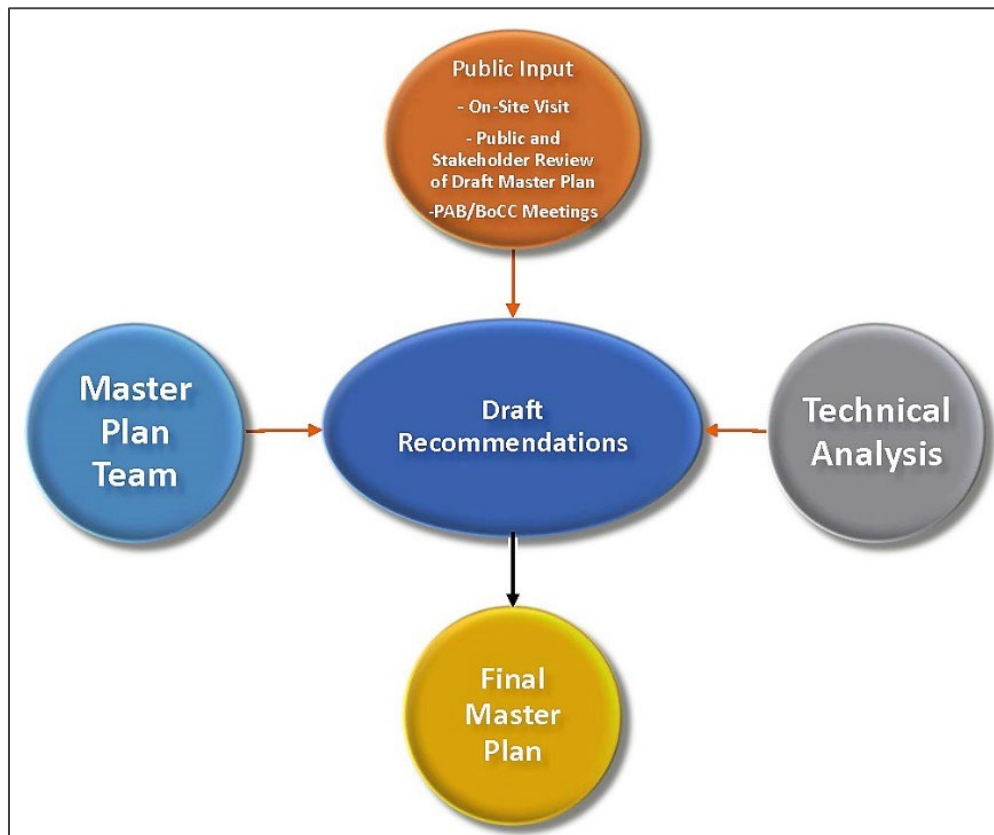


Figure 15 - The Master Plan Process

Public Review

Post cards with an invitation to review the draft master plan were sent to 205 adjacent land owners. Additional post cards were distributed to the Black Forest Trails Association, the Trails and Open Space Coalition, and Park Advisory Board Members. An email with the same invitation to review the plan was sent to 622 people on the El Paso County Parks general interest email list.

El Paso County Parks developed and maintained a website dedicated to the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan. The public was able to view the draft master plan beginning June 3rd, 2022. Public comments were accepted until July 8th but conversations continued well into July. The plan was also advertised on El Paso County Park's social media page. Reviewers were encouraged to provide comments and suggestions via an email link.

A public hiking tour of Homestead Ranch Regional Park took place on June 24th, 2022. The hike was hosted by staff from El Paso County Parks and the El Paso County Nature Centers. The hike was attended by 17 people and included representatives from the Park Advisory Board, local landowners, the Trails and Open Space Coalition, Black Forest Trails Association, and the public. Attendees were able to learn about the park and were able to convey their suggestions and comments regarding park improvements.

Publicity and Public Comments

Throughout the public review process, the master plan received coverage on the 'Outdoors with Hiking Bob' podcast, the Trails and Open Space Coalition Newsletter, the Black Forest Trails Association Annual Meeting, and was featured on Colorado Public Radio's peak minute segment.

In total, 34 public comments were received. Notes summarizing the comments received throughout the public review process are included as appendices at the end of this Master Plan. Overall, the comments were supportive of the master plan. Most citizens appreciate the quiet, secluded nature of the park. The playground, pavilion and fishing pond are appreciated in the active use area. Equestrian users enjoy the horse watering trough and easy trailer access. Recognizing and closing the loop on select single-track trails was supported. Although local property owners are against developing trails on the buttes. It was discovered that fencing and signage could be improved at the south end of the property to better delineate public trails vs. the private trail easement that is closed to the general public.

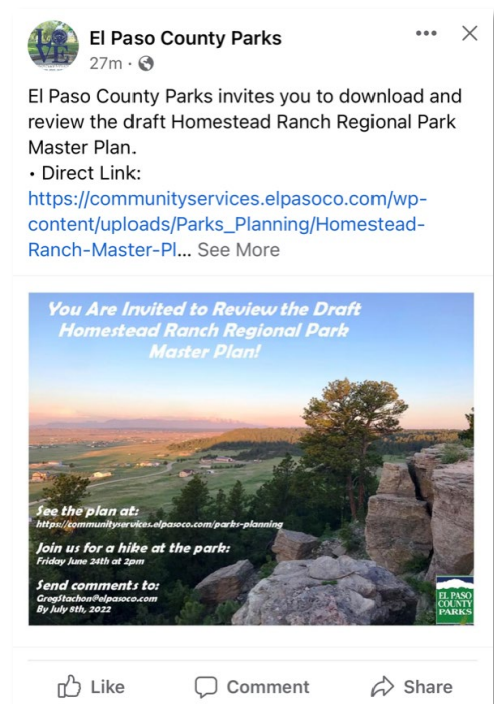


Figure 16 – Social Media Post advertising the draft Master Plan

CHAPTER 4 – MASTER PLAN GOALS

Goals serve to establish the foundation of the Master Plan, as they guide decisions on future use of the property and provide direction and structure for the master planning process. The goals and objectives created for this plan were derived from the El Paso County Parks Master Plan (2021), input from the Master Plan Team, and from citizens as part of public input opportunities. The existing Parks mission and goals are as follows.

El Paso County Parks Master Plan – The El Paso County Parks Master Plan (2021) includes the following Mission Statement:

The Mission of El Paso County Parks is to enhance quality of life in El Paso County by:

- *“Acquiring, developing, maintaining, and preserving regional parks, trails, and open space.”*
- *“Providing responsible resource management for open space lands characterized by unique natural environments.”*
- *“Providing natural and cultural history interpretation, education, and information services.”*
- *“Supporting major community events and festivals that celebrate our County’s heritage and culture.”*
- *“Providing and managing visitor destinations and experiences.”*

In concert with this Mission Statement, a number of goals and objectives were established in the El Paso County Parks Master Plan as a whole. Included among these goals are several statements that can be related to regional parks such as Homestead Ranch. The following are examples of these more specific goals and objectives:

- *“Provide high quality and safe experiences for users of county park facilities and recreational areas.”*
- *“Enhance communication and engagement with users to maximize satisfaction with the visitor experience.”*
- *“Maintain a consistent and equitable level of services by filling gaps in existing service levels and providing new facilities and services to meet future population demand.”*

The goals and the mission statement listed above assist in providing a basis for the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan and for the further development of site-specific goals and recommendations to be included in the plan.

Homestead Ranch Master Plan Goals

The establishment of goals specific to Homestead Ranch Regional Park was based upon not only system-wide goals and objectives, but also a thorough analysis and understanding of the community preferences demonstrated by the public review of the draft Master Plan, public hiking tours of the open space, and input from the Master Plan Team. Preliminary goals were refined to better reflect the interconnected values of similar goals, then categorized into groups based on their function within the overall plan. As a result, the following goals have been established for this Master Plan, with primary goals shown in bold:

Recreation

Provide high quality and safe experiences for users of county park facilities and recreational areas.

- Evaluate playground and active-use site for ADA compliance.
- Consider public safety and minimize user conflicts by planning trails for all user groups.
- Plan, build, and maintain trails to a sustainable standard. Add trail surfacing and improve drainage.
- Maintain quality of the existing pond, athletic field, and pavilions.



Figure 17 – Homestead Ranch Playground

Open Space Preservation

- **Establish a forest management plan to promote a healthy forest.**
- Promote areas of natural grasses, wetland, and aquatic vegetation within the park.
- Consider strategic property acquisition to preserve the unique landscape of the park.
- Analyze current use of the park and consider impacts of existing development and future capital improvements
- Establish a wildfire mitigation plan and implementation strategy.

Education

- **Provide educational program opportunities on the natural and cultural history of the area.**
- Provide a variety of educational and interpretive opportunities concerning geology, flora and fauna. Interpret the cultural history of the site as used by indigenous people and early settlers.
- Enhance interpretation and wayfinding signage within the park.

Management and Administration

- **Maintain and upgrade existing facilities while meeting future population demand.**
- Evaluate the age and condition of existing facilities in the park.

- Consider expanded maintenance facilities and storage yard to support maintenance of the park.
- Establish a turf management plan for the multi-use field and active use area. Consider soil amendments for the field, and strategic turf areas and native grass / flower areas near the pavilions and playground.
- Analyze water quality of the pond to support fishing opportunities.
- Evaluate current forest management objectives in regard to tree, shrub, and natural grass health, control of noxious weeds and other invasive species, and wildfire fuels management.
- Consider strategic acquisitions adjacent to the park to allow for added preservation of the landscape, and explore additional outdoor recreation opportunities.

Communication and Engagement

- **Maximize user satisfaction**
- Ensure the community is aware of the recreational and preservation opportunities within the park.
- Promote local and regional connectivity between Homestead Ranch Regional Park and surrounding communities.

Implementation and Funding

- **Establish a sustainable operational budget which balances future capital and maintenance expenditures.**
- Develop an implementation plan for new capital improvements.
- Establish a prioritization of major maintenance needs to allow the County to maintain an adequate level of service to the community.
- In order to address park needs, identify and pursue all available funds for implementation of improvements, as well as future enhancements.



Figure 18 – Panoramic view of Homestead Ranch Regional Park

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CHAPTER 5 – SITE ANALYSIS

Site Analysis

Homestead Ranch has a variety of aspects. Aspect is the direction a piece of land faces. The escarpment that runs east to west through Homestead Ranch in general has a southerly aspect. Land having a particular aspect, facing a particular direction is subject to the influences of that exposure. For example a trail with a south facing aspect will have less snow in winter than a northerly aspect. The aspect along the escarpment varies from southeast to southwest facing. With regard to user experience and sustainable design, northern exposure is cool in the summer, but holds moisture, snow and ice in the winter, which may create hazardous trail conditions. A southern aspect will be warmer and will hold less moisture. The southern aspect of the escarpment is mitigated by the trees growing along this slope which provide cooler conditions in the summer. The park's trails through the wooded section of the property are pleasant in the summer but can hold on to moisture and snow for longer in the winter and spring. The trails on the top of the escarpment, on the north half of the park, are in a grassland environment which increases the sun exposure making the trails in this part of the park warmer in the summer but also pleasant in the fall and winter.

Active Use Area Analysis

- While the restroom was built to ADA standard when it was constructed, it needs to be evaluated to ensure it meets current ADA standards.
- The multi-use field has struggled due to soil conditions and weather patterns along the butte. It is recommended to develop a turf management plan which may include soil amendments and overseeding to promote a healthy turf field.
- Native grasses around the active use area provide limited opportunities for informal use near the pavilions and playground. Native grasses near highly used areas are generally not recommended as they do not respond well to frequent use and/or mowing. It is suggested to install limited turf areas in these high use areas while letting native grasses/flowers grow taller.

Playground Area Analysis

- The play surfacing is currently Engineered Wood Fiber (EWF). EWF material meets impact resistance tests if it is the proper depth but it requires continual maintenance.
- The north playground area is located on a hill providing a unique experience between the two playground areas. The north area features swings, but no sitting areas. This area is also exposed to full sun which makes it hot in the summer.
- The surrounding playground landscape features native grasses and mulch beds. These limits common perimeter uses like seating and picnicking around the playground.

Pond Area Analysis

- The pond is used to supplement park irrigation and provides an opportunity for aquatic habitat, fishing opportunities, and wildlife viewing. Currently there is a removable floating dock that provides fishing opportunities.
- Blue-green algae has been a consistent problem in the pond. Ongoing management of the issue is recommended to ensure viability of aquatic habitat, water quality, and fishing opportunities.
- The pond is primarily surrounded by riprap which limits natural aquatic vegetation and access to the water for fishing. It's recommended to develop some more natural areas and access points.

- The pond is currently being stocked with fish by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), however the high pH of the water limits the type of fish that are stocked. Catfish and bluegill are currently being stocked.

Parking Lots / Roads / Drainage Analysis

- The main parking lot was planned to be completed in phases, but due to funding shortfalls it was never completed. Currently the parking lot is gravel with a concrete curb and gutter perimeter. While a gravel lot is acceptable and preferable for equestrian use, it is subject to erosion and requires more maintenance.
- The gravel parking lot contains two dedicated ADA stalls. The existing lot can park 68 autos. According to the 2010 ADA guidelines a parking lot in the range of 51-75 stalls shall provide 3 ADA parking stalls, one of which must be van accessible.
- The main parking lot, entrance drive, and maintenance road suffer from washboarding and erosion after storm events. They lack sufficient drainage improvements, gravel, or grading. The southeast corner of the parking lot is particularly prone to erosion.
- The gravel drive from Golihar Road to the parking lot / trailhead is 2,500' long and 24' wide. Additional gravel is needed to resurface the roadway as it has lost gravel over the years from road grading operations.
- To the east of the restroom building there is a persistent wet spot due to runoff from the access road and playground. This limits use of the area around the building. It is recommended to convey this stormwater runoff away from the building.
- There is an informal trailhead at the end of Lovaca Drive but no formal parking or signage to appropriately identify the park or provide wayfinding.

Trail Analysis

Original Trails - When the park was first developed in the early 2000's, two miles of trail were constructed. These trails were built to a Tier 1 standard (8' wide with ditch) but they did not include trail surfacing. Instead, they were constructed using native surface materials, which mostly comprised of sandy gravel. Since initial construction, several sections of trail have been surfaced, but the majority of the trail remains native. These native surfaced trails are more susceptible to erosion, require more maintenance, and are substandard.



Figure 19 – Existing Native Surface Trail

Some of the 6' and 8' wide trails at Homestead Ranch have been surfaced after they were built, but it has been done sporadically and as Park Operations has received extra trail surfacing and has time to install it. The Tier I and Tier III trails in the park should all receive trail surfacing and be evaluated for drainage so that they are firm and sustainable trails.

Current Park Trails –The Park currently features four looped trails of varying size and condition totaling 5.3 miles. There are another 2 miles of social trails. These trails are all connected by the main park trail named the Homestead Ranch Trail. The most recent trail development occurred in 2015 when native surface double-track trails were constructed for expanded access into the grassland area in the northern part of the park.

- **Active Use Area Trails (0.74 miles)** Internal park trails begin at the parking area and create a loop around the pond. There are two segments that branch off and connect to the Homestead Ranch Regional Trail at the top of the ridge. One segment follows the west side of the active use area and connects to a private trail easement south of the main park.
- **The Spur Trail (0.89 miles)** is located in the western portion of the park. It runs along the top of the ridge and within tall grasses. It is comprised of both Tier I trail and native double-track trail.
- **The Wagon Wheel Trail (0.86 miles)** is located in the northern portion of the park. It makes a loop within tall grasses and rolling hills. It is comprised of both Tier I trail and native double-track trail.
- **The Rattlesnake Trail (0.92 miles)** is located in the eastern portion of the park and runs along the top of the ridge and is a Tier I trail.
- **The Homestead Ranch Trail (1.9 miles)** is the primary trail within the park that provides access from the main active use area, around the pond, and to all three loop trails above the ridge. The Homestead Ranch Trail is also planned to connect to the larger Palmer Divide Regional Trail.

Palmer Divide Regional Trail - The Palmer Divide Regional Trail is planned to connect communities in Black Forest to several regional parks and open spaces. This includes Black Forest Regional Park, Pinerias Open Space, Woodlake Trail, and Homestead Ranch Regional Park. The Homestead Ranch Trail is a segment of the Palmer Divide Regional Trail and bisects the park from east to west along the top of the escarpment.

A unique aspect of Homestead Ranch is the watering trough powered by a windmill. The watering trough is located at the intersection of the Wagon Wheel Trail, the Spur Trail, and the Homestead Ranch Trail. There is a functioning windmill which supplies a watering trough. Hitching posts and benches make this location an attractive place for equestrian trail users.

Social Trails - Social trails are non-designated trails that were not planned or constructed by El Paso County Parks, but rather have formed through repeated use by people over time. Several Social trails have been identified within the park.

There are 2.17 miles of existing social trails inside the main park. There are two trail segments that run along the top of the ridge. These trails are parallel to the existing Tier I (8' wide) trail that runs along the top of the ridge. It appears that most of social trails that have developed over time. However, the social trail on the west side of the escarpment connects to a picnic bench is intentional. The trail that leads from the maintenance yard to the watering trough as seen in the figure above, is benched into the hillside and



Figure 20 - Existing Single-track Trail at Homestead Ranch

seems to be an intentionally built trail. In addition to the ridgeline trails, there are social trails along the west and south property lines that connect the Spur Trail to the Homestead Ranch Trail. This trail is steep where it makes a turn at the SW corner of the park. There is another steep section where this trail crosses a drainage way.

There are also social trails outside the main park in the isolated Homestead Ranch properties. Reata Filing No.1 Tract 1 Park Site is a 41-acre parcel to the south of Homestead Ranch. This parcel is owned by the county and is surrounded by acreages, many who own horses. There is a 0.63-mile-long trail through this county owned parcel of land. The area homeowners have a 1,500' long trail easement that connects Reata Filing No.1 Tract 1 Park Site to the main Homestead Ranch Park.

The other social trail located outside the main Homestead Ranch Park, is located to the east of the main park through Reata Filing No.1A Park Site Tract 3A. Tract 3A is a 26.8-acre parcel that includes Rattlesnake Butte. This parcel is surrounded by acreages. The trail is 0.74-miles total and would not be considered a complete trail. The trail is more defined in some places than in others. If this trail were to be recognized as an official trail, it would have to be improved. Fencing is not complete around this parcel, so fencing would need to be added in strategic places as well.

The park's social trails do not show up on official maps. It may be time to recognize some of the park's single-track social trails as legitimate trails that enhance the recreation. Single-track trails provide a unique experience and serve different user groups than the park's wide 6-8' Tier I and III Trails. In addition to being narrower, single-track trails may also feature technical rocky sections, switchbacks, and steeper descents than Tier I and III Trails. These characteristics are preferred by mountain bikers. The woody location of the park's single track may also be preferred by hikers who come to Homestead Ranch as a shaded retreat from the urbanized parts of the county. It is recommended to officially recognize some of the park's single-track trails and make smoother connections to existing trails where appropriate.

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CHAPTER 6 – RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

Introduction

This Master Plan has been developed through site analysis and the input of the Master Plan Team, stakeholders, and the general public via the outreach and communication process outlined in Chapter 5. The Master Plan Team collaborated to generate goals and objectives, analyze public comments and suggestions, and address priorities for Master Plan recommendations. As members of the Master Plan Team, East District Park Operations staff were key contributors, bringing in-depth knowledge of both the strengths and challenges. Combined, these sources of input helped ensure that recommendations included in this chapter will make the best use of limited resources. Given available resources, recommended action items will be implemented according to a phased schedule. More information about implementation and phasing is included in Chapter 7. In accordance with many of the master plan goals, this plan was developed with sustainability and responsible resource management as key principles.

The recommendations that follow are organized into categories that reflect the Master Plan goals:

- **Conservation and Stewardship**
- **Recreation**
- **Historic Preservation and Education**
- **Management and Administration**
- **Community Awareness**
- **Implementation and Funding**

Master Plan Recommendations and Action Items

Based upon the Master Plan Goals outlined in Chapter 4, the following improvements are recommended:

Conservation and Stewardship – As outlined in the Existing Conditions Chapter, conservation and stewardship recommendations will maintain and improve the park’s natural, scenic, open space, aesthetic, ecological, recreational, historic, and environmental characteristics. While somewhat general in nature, these recommendations will help to guide the planning and construction of other more specific recommendations, such as trail networks and interpretive opportunities.

1. Plan and develop open space recreational amenities with an emphasis on environmentally friendly construction techniques, such as limiting the use of heavy equipment, except in those cases where low-impact techniques cannot accomplish certain tasks without undue hardship on contractors and staff.
2. Restrict access to environmentally sensitive areas in the park, such as wetlands and drainage areas where certain species of flora and fauna thrive. Trails should be planned to carefully follow natural features and to encourage park users to remain on trails and out of sensitive areas.
3. Continue coordination with El Paso County Environmental Services to treat and monitor noxious weeds and invasive species. Annual surveys and noxious weed removal will allow the grasslands to return to a more natural and sustainable state.
4. Develop a forestry management plan with an emphasis on wildland fire fuels reduction, further protecting natural and biological values while maximizing the park’s ecological health and internal scenic resources.

5. Consider acquiring land adjacent to Homestead Ranch Regional Park to preserve the forest along the escarpment which continues from east to west along the Palmer Divide. This would help to conserve scenic and recreational resources of land which would otherwise be developed in the future.

Active Use Area – The existing playground, restroom facility, fishing pond, picnic pavilions, and existing trails will be evaluated to maintain the quality of park patrons are accustomed to.

Playground Area

1. Evaluate condition of current playground equipment for needed repairs and ADA accessibility. Install an ADA swing and poured in place surfacing in playground.
2. Evaluate native grass and landscaping near the pavilions and playground. Install limited turf areas, shade, and sitting areas around the playground and pavilion.
3. Develop a turf management plan for the multi-use field.

Parking Lot, Roads, Sidewalks

1. Install ADA compliant parking stalls and access to the restroom and active use areas along sidewalks.
2. Pave the parking lot to provide standard parking near the active use area, while preserving a gravel parking area for equestrian users.
3. Address stormwater runoff from the active use area and properly convey it into native areas. This is particularly important around the main building, adjacent gravel drive, and along the southeastern side of the parking lot.
4. Remove shipping container and stockpiling of materials in the parking lot and expand current storage yard.
5. Install parking and signage at Lovaca Drive.



Figure 21 - Existing Parking Lot and ADA Parking Signs

Pond Area

1. Improve water quality to maintain fish populations and treat blue green algae. Continue working with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to stock the pond with fish species that can tolerate a higher ph. Improve water quality if possible.
2. Install seating areas with shade around the pond.

Site Furnishings and Wayfinding

1. Install standardized entrance, wayfinding, and trail marker signage throughout the park.
2. Install benches at various locations throughout the open space, primarily in locations which offer visitors a scenic view, while providing for rest and shade.

Trails – Homestead Ranch Regional Park features a looped trail system serving users of all ages and abilities and consisting of a combination of Tier I, and Tier III trails. Selective Tier IV single-track trails will be constructed while closures will decommission redundant or unsafe Tier IV social trails.

Tier I Trails

1. Install crushed limestone trail surfacing to unsurfaced portions of the Homestead Ranch Trail to establish a contiguous Tier I Trail through the park.

Tier II Double-Track Trails

1. Maintain double-track trail loops in the native portions of the park to highlight equestrian use.

Tier III Park Trails

1. Install crushed limestone trail surfacing to unsurfaced portions of internal park trails to create sustainable multi-use trail loops in the park.
2. Improve steep turns to reduce erosion and increase public safety.

Tier IV Single-Track Trails

1. Explore a native surface single-track trail along the base of the eastern escarpment and connect to the Tier IV trail on the top of the ridge. The lower portion of this trail would follow the proposed Homestead Ranch Secondary Regional Trail.
2. Evaluate the native surface single-track trail in the south east part of the park. Explore a more sustainable trail alignment.



Figure 22 - Existing Tier III Trail without Surfacing

3. Decommission single-track trails that are too steep or are redundant shortcuts.

Historic Preservation and Education – This corner of El Paso County has a rich history, from its natural physical features, to Native American and European settlement. The following are action items for Historic Preservation and Education:

1. Develop and install interpretive signage to inform visitors of both the natural history and human influence on Homestead Ranch Regional Park and the surrounding area.
2. Coordinate with History Colorado to research the history of early settlement in the area related to forestry and agriculture.
3. Develop educational programs that highlight the natural features and cultural history of Homestead Ranch Regional Park. Educational opportunities may focus on the site's geology, wildlife, and natural resources. The history of El Paso County's indigenous peoples, including the Mountain Ute, Arapahoe, Kiowa, Sioux, Cheyenne tribes may be explored along with the modern history with a focus on agriculture and the original residents of Homestead Ranch.

Management and Administration – Responsible management and administration of Homestead Ranch Regional Park ensures that the park remains financially and environmentally sustainable for years to come while meeting the recreational and educational needs of residents and visitors. Master Plan goals call for the development of forestry and noxious weed management plans, as well as best-practice maintenance and operation plans.

The following are action items for park management and administration:

1. Coordinate with El Paso County Environmental Services to establish a noxious weed identification and mitigation program. Annual noxious weed surveys and subsequent invasive species mitigation will allow the native environment to return to a more natural and sustainable state.
2. Develop a forestry management plan with an emphasis on wildland fire fuels reduction, further protecting natural and biological values while maximizing the park's ecological health and internal scenic resources.
3. Consider strategic land acquisitions to not only expand recreational opportunities, but also to create buffer zones and conserve the forest ecosystem along the ridgeline.
4. Complete a water quality assessment of the fishing pond to promote aquatic habitat, fishing opportunities, and the pond's accessibility.

Community Awareness – Outreach programs provide awareness, sponsorship, fundraising, and volunteer opportunities to support programs and facility development of El Paso County parks, trails, open spaces, Nature Centers and other facilities. Outreach services provides opportunities to benefit the community and improve the quality of life for County residents with volunteer opportunities such as Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail, Trail Ambassadors, Creek Week, and friends groups, as well as donation opportunities through such longstanding programs as Partners in the Park and the Trust for Community Parks. The following are action items for Community Awareness:



Figure 23 – Combined El Paso County Parks and Trails and Open Space Coalition Group Hike

1. Create a Homestead Ranch friends group to promote ongoing volunteer opportunities within the open space, as well as a source for continuing fiscal support for open space projects by those who have a dedicated and vested interest in the long term stability of the open space.
2. Through the use of social media, brochures, signage, and email, provide the community with updated park information including new or updated recreational amenities, park rules and regulations, as well as educational programming. Outdoor concerts may be held at the park through Recreation and Cultural Services.
3. Generate positive interaction with the citizen stakeholders, encouraging responsible park use, public input and awareness.
4. Promote neighborhood and regional connectivity between Homestead Ranch Regional Park and nearby recreational opportunities, including but not limited to the proposed Palmer Divide Regional Trail, the Homestead Ranch Secondary Regional Trail, the town of Peyton, CO and developing suburbs to the south.

Implementation and Funding – The prioritization and phasing of capital improvements for Homestead Ranch Regional Park, as expressed in the Implementation Plan in Chapter 7, was derived from input by the public, stakeholders, and Master Plan Team members, with endorsement by the Park Advisory Board and approval by the Board of County Commissioners. This initial capital improvement budget gives consideration to new recreational amenities as well as initial forestry management and maintenance needs, while considering available funding, benefit for cost, project complexity, and improvement urgency. Chapter 7 provides a detailed explanation of existing and possible funding sources, and phasing of improvements, to be completed within the next ten years. The following action items are recommended for Implementation and Funding:

1. As a means to establish long-lasting and sustainable local support for Homestead Ranch Regional Park, develop partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and agencies, such as the Rocky Mountain Field Institute, Trails and Open Space Coalition, Mile High Youth Corps, the Roundup Riders of the Rockies Heritage and Trails Foundation, and Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates and to assist with the funding, development, maintenance, and/or promotion of the park and its educational and recreational opportunities. It is also suggested to reach out to local soccer groups and other team sports who may be interested in using the park's athletic fields.
2. Research and pursue financial grants, such as those from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, to allow for enhanced funding of future park improvements.

Design Guidelines

Design Guidelines are intended to aid in the design and implementation of the proposed site improvements and amenities with a cohesive and visually appealing pallet of materials that can be implemented throughout Homestead Ranch Regional Park. In order to blend well with the natural surroundings while also taking into account the open space's historic past, new site improvements such as trails, benches, fencing, signage, and general thematic elements should not contrast or distract from the natural and/or historical environment. At the same time, park amenities should embody current trends in park improvements, with a focus on sustainable materials requiring low maintenance. El Paso County Parks always strives to use best management practices in the design and construction of park, trail, and open space improvements.

All proposed projects that implement the recommendations and goals of this Master Plan should include detailed planning of trails, grading and drainage, fencing, signage, and site furnishings. All projects must be performed in accordance with all applicable local, state, and federal rules, regulations, and standards.

Drainage and Grading – Straddling the Palmer Divide, Homestead Ranch Regional Park is at the headwaters of several creeks including the Middle and Upper Brackett Creek to the south and the West Bijou Creek to the north. Drainages on the high side of the ridge flow gently toward the north. Drainages on the south side of the ridge flow more steeply to the south. Gullies can be found within the hillside where the elevation drops off to a more level plain on the south side of the park. Where small drainages exist, drainage improvements, such as culverts, or foot-bridges may be necessary when planning new trails. Improvements should not increase runoff from what historically exists. Disturbances of more than one acre, trigger a sediment and erosion control permit.

Trail Standards – All proposed and existing trails in Homestead Ranch Regional Park will conform to El Paso County’s trail classifications and standards and will be constructed for sustainability. Currently three trail standards exist for the trails proposed for construction within the open space: Tier I, which is the primary standard for Primary Regional Trails; Tier III, which is primarily used for well-traveled internal park trails; and Tier IV, which is a single-track trail. For long-term durability, Tier I Trails would require road base and crusher fine surface and a shoulder, while Tier III trails would only require a crusher fine surfacing. Tier IV or single-track trails have natural surfacing, which requires well-planned and sustainable trail construction practices.



Figure 24 – Existing section of Tier I trail at Homestead Ranch

Signage – A successful signage program provides regulatory, interpretive (educational) and directional or wayfinding information. All County signs should be designed in accordance with El Paso County Parks standards. Signs should be compatible and consistent with accurate trail identification and wayfinding.

1. **Entry** – Entry signs are installed at the entry to a park or open space to identify a sense of arrival and where the park begins. Homestead Ranch has a metal sign with the parks’ address (Figure 25) and a ranch style entry sign as shown in Figure 27.



Figure 25 – Existing entry sign vs. standard El Paso County Park entry sign

2. **Regulatory** – Regulatory signage is used to identify the rules and regulations. They should be placed in strategic access points such as staging areas and trailheads and may include hours of operation, appropriate use and activity information, open space rules and regulations, and public notices and general information.



Figure 26 – Rules tree and Trail courtesy sign

3. **Interpretive** – Interpretive signage is used to identify and educate about topics such as natural and cultural resources. These signs should be placed in strategic areas such as staging areas, viewpoints and other features of interest. Interpretative signage can include cultural history, identification of key plant species, wildlife habitat and education about land stewardship and resource degradation.
4. **Directional** – Directional signage is used to identify location, direction, distance and places of interest for trails users. Markers should be placed at strategic intervals or at strategic areas such as viewpoints or intersections. Directional signage should include designation and length and provide trail user location.
5. **Wayfinding** – This sign type includes park entry signs, general park boundary markers, trail maps, and wayfinding signage specific to open space facilities. Homestead Ranch has unique wayfinding signage that was installed in 2014 to identify the different trails at the top of the ridge. The signs are 4”x4” cedar posts with a chamfered top. The posts have 4”x4” aluminum placards with symbols indicating which trail one is on. The spur symbol for example is the “Spur Trail”, the house symbol is the “Homestead Trail”, the snake symbol is the “Rattlesnake Trail”, and the wagon wheel is the “Wagon Wheel Trail”.



Figure 27 – Ranch style entry sign at Homestead



Figure 28 – Homestead Wayfinding post

Fencing – Two types of fencing are used within the park, each for a different purpose. These fence types include:

1. **Post and Dowel Fence** – Post and dowel fencing is used primarily to delineate spaces and provide barriers. 2-rail post and dowel fencing is used around the main parking lot and along the drive leading to the main parking lot. This type of fence promotes proper trail use and reduces the formation of social trails and overland foot traffic in high-use areas or in those locations when two sections of trail are easily visible and accessible to each other. This is the preferred alternative to split-rail fencing, which is not as durable.



Figure 28 – 2-Rail Post and Dowel Fencing at Homestead

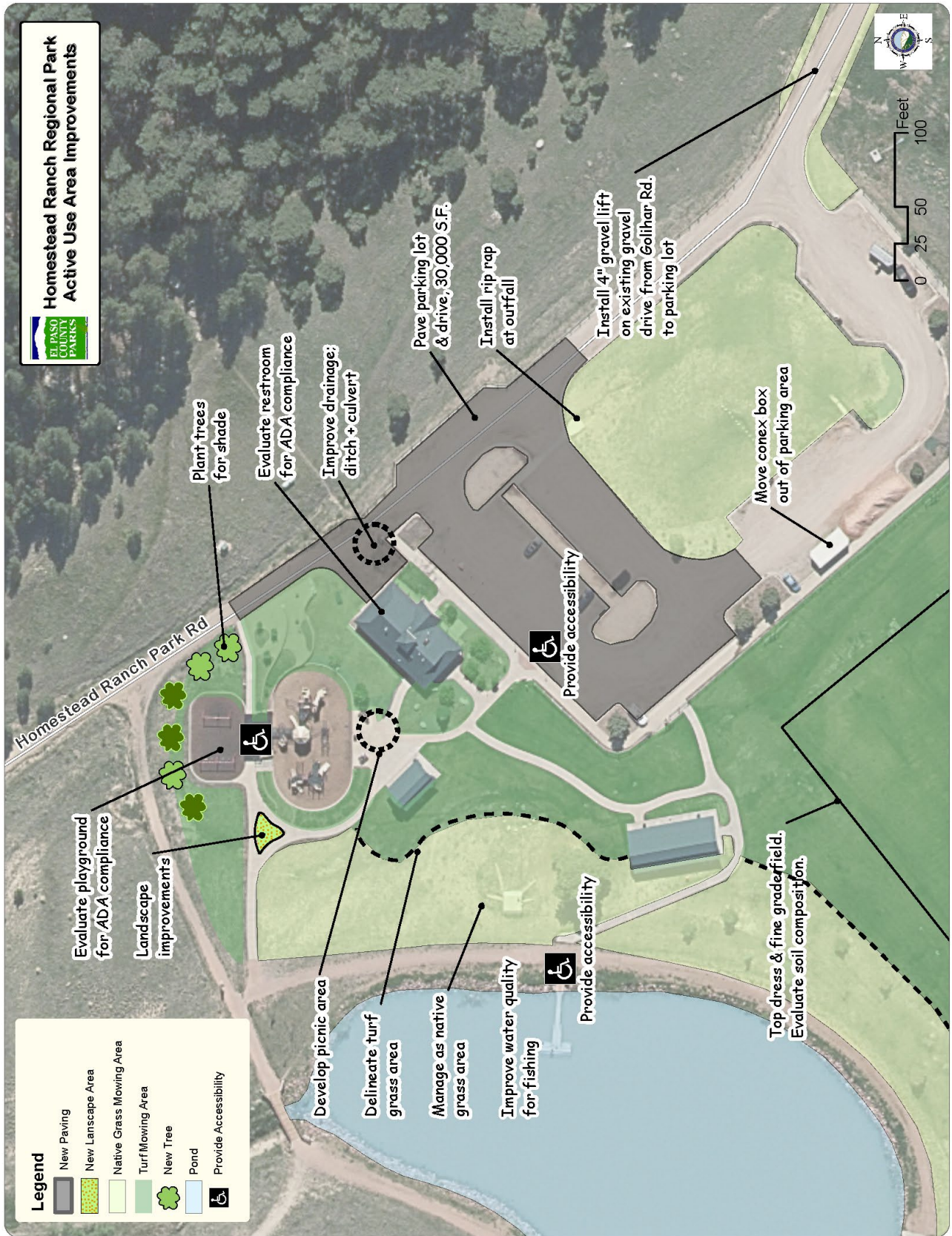
2. **Wire Fence** – Wire fencing is used for the park perimeter. If new fencing is needed along the perimeter, four-wire wildlife friendly wire fencing will be installed. Wildlife friendly fencing allows for safe passage of wildlife, it has a high visibility smooth top wire, two barbed wires in the middle, and a smooth wire on the bottom that is installed at least 16” off the ground.

Site Furnishings – Site furnishings within the park include benches, trash receptacles, information kiosks, and other minimal site furnishings, such as dog waste stations, as deemed necessary. Site furnishings are earth-tone colors such as dark brown and forest green. Site furnishings should be consistent and compatible in style throughout the park. Both the main restroom and picnic pavilions have green metal roofs. Picnic tables and waste receptacles in the active use are brown perforated metal. There are a few memorial benches in the park that are green. Types of site furniture selected should be sustainable, low-maintenance, durable, and vandal resistant.



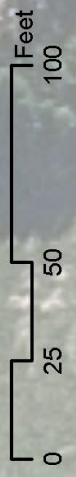
Figure 29 – Bench and Picnic Table at Homestead

The following maps illustrate recommended improvements to the active use area, maintenance area, and trails.



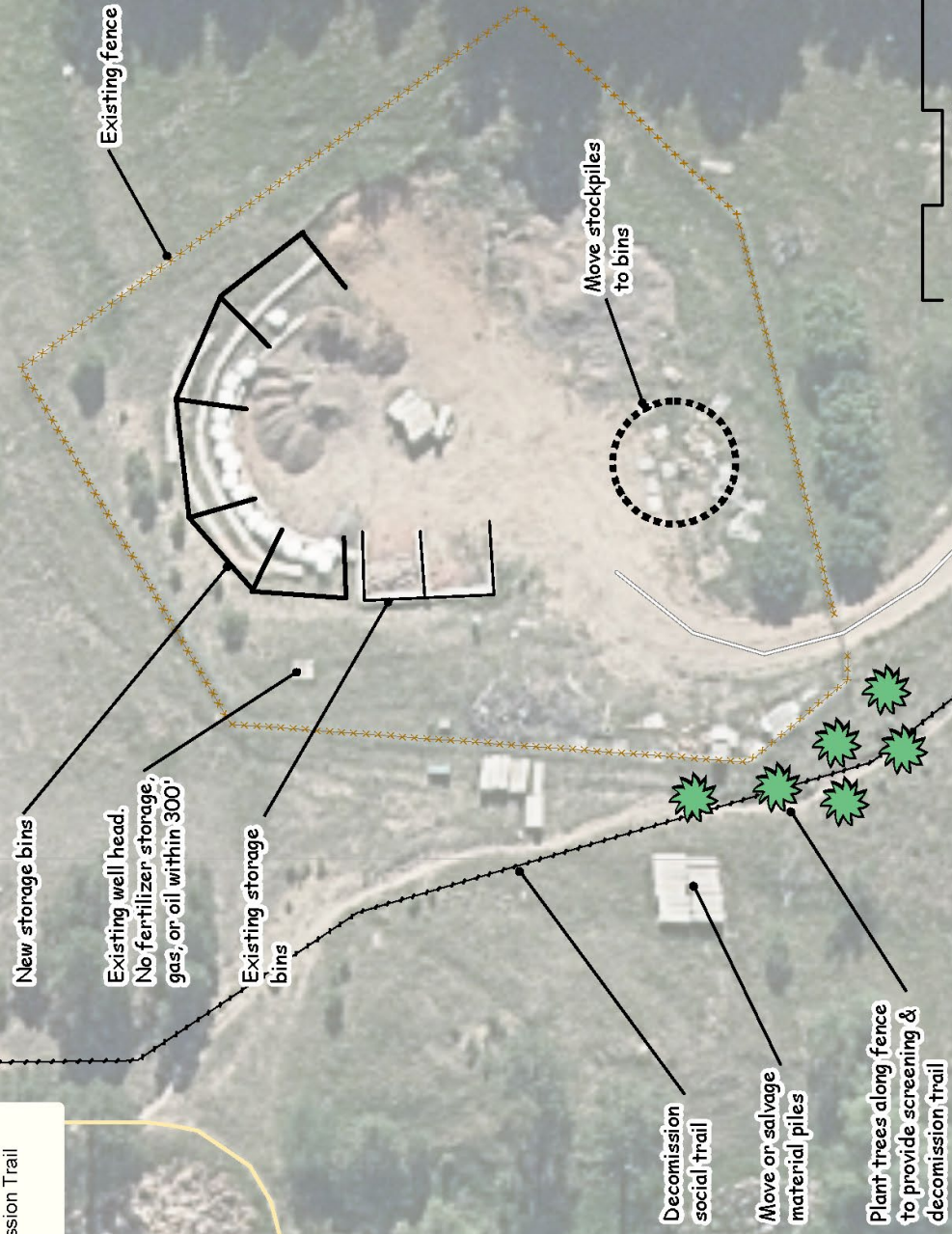
Map 3 – Homestead Ranch Active Use Area Improvements Map

**Homestead Ranch Regional Park
Maintenance Area Improvements**

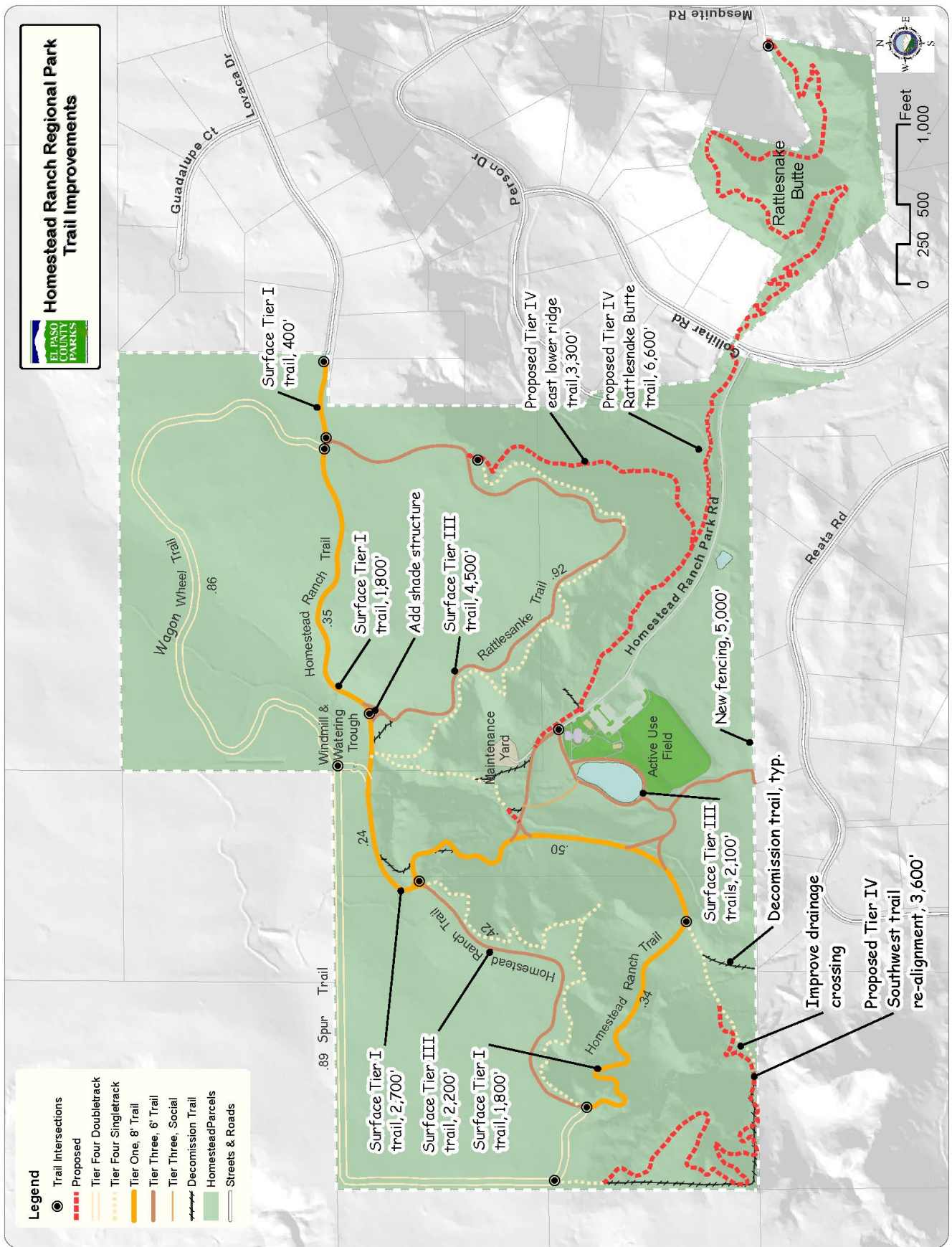


Legend

- xxxxxxx Fence
- New Tree
- Tier Four
- Existing Trails
- +++++ Decommission Trail



Map 4 – Homestead Ranch Maintenance Area Improvements Map



Map 5 – Homestead Ranch Trail Improvements Map

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CHAPTER 7 – PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan is intended to be a guiding document for improvements to this property over a period of 7-10 years. The Master Plan is designed to be implemented in multiple phases. This chapter of the Master Plan outlines the planning-level costs for implementing each phase of improvements and provides general guidance and explanation of possible revenue sources for the continued improvement and maintenance of Homestead Ranch Regional Park.

Existing Revenue Sources

El Paso County Parks is comprised of two divisions – Park Operations and Recreation and Cultural Services. Although a separate team from Park Operations, Community Outreach staff provides additional monetary and volunteer support for Parks and other County programs, as needed. El Paso County Parks is operated on a predetermined yearly budget through a variety of funding sources, with funds being applied to both ongoing park operations, such as salaries, materials, and maintenance of existing facilities, as well as major capital improvement projects for new park, trail, and open space facilities. Park operations, major maintenance projects, and capital improvement projects, such as those proposed in this master plan, are funded through the following sources:

General Fund Tax Support – El Paso County Parks are funded in part by approximately \$2.7 million each year from the County General Fund. These funds are supported from a combination of property tax and sales tax, as well as various fees and charges. These funds are used primarily for administrative and supervisory salaries, materials and supplies, and other general operation expenses. El Paso County does not have a dedicated sales use or property tax to support parks, trails, and open space.

Conservation Trust Funds – El Paso County Parks currently receives approximately \$1.4 million annually from the State of Colorado Department of Local Affairs' (DOLA) Conservation Trust Fund (CTF). DOLA distributes CTF dollars quarterly, on a per capita basis, to over 470 eligible local governments: counties, cities, towns, and special districts that provide park and recreation services to the public. Funding can be used for the acquisition, development, maintenance, and capital improvement of new or existing publicly accessible recreational facility.

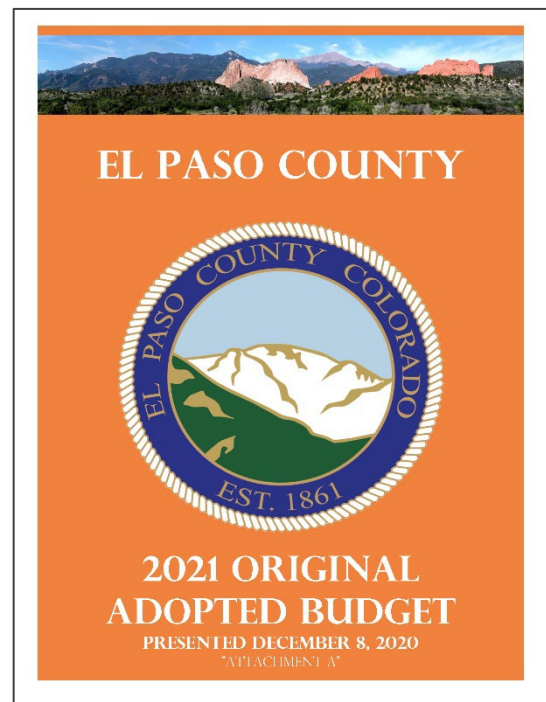


Figure 30 - The 2021 El Paso County Annual Adopted Budget

El Paso County uses a majority of the annual allotment of CTF funds for ongoing operation and maintenance of its parks, trails, and open space facilities.

Development Fees and Land Dedication – Development fees are one-time charges imposed on residential subdivision development projects at the time of final platting to recover capital costs for public recreational facilities needed to serve new developments and the additional residents, employees, and visitors they bring to the community. State laws and local regulations, with a few minor exceptions, prohibit the use of development fees for ongoing maintenance or operations costs, therefore funds are designated primarily for capital improvement projects.

El Paso County Parks receives approximately \$200,000-\$300,000 annually in regional park fees, which can be used for development and/or improvement of Regional Park, trail, or open space facilities or for the purchase of park or open space property. The regional fees must be used in designated areas where the fees were collected.

Urban park fees, of which El Paso County Parks receives approximately \$100,000-\$150,000 annually, may be used for the development and/or improvement of smaller community, neighborhood, or pocket parks and recreation facilities by the County or by another governmental or quasi-governmental entity, such as a school or metropolitan district, through the County’s Urban Park Grant Program.

Program and Facility Use Fees – These fees are charged for a variety of individual or group uses currently generating approximately \$500,000 per year for the park system overall. Examples of user fees employed by El Paso County include park and recreation facility rentals, recreational program fees, booth leases (for vendors in parks, special events, and tournaments), special use permits, admissions/ticket sales, and County Fair fees. These funds are utilized primarily to fund ongoing park operations and minor maintenance.

Grants – Grants often supplement or match funds that have already been received. For example, grants can be used for programs, planning, design, seed capital, and construction of major capital improvement projects. Due to their generally unpredictable nature, grants are often used to fund a specific venture and should not be viewed as a continuous source of funding. Through a successful grant writing program, El Paso County Parks has been awarded a five-year annual average of \$500,000-\$1,000,000 through various types of grant awards. County Parks actively pursues grants on a yearly basis for park and trail projects from Great Outdoor Colorado (GOCO), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Colorado Parks and Wildlife Trails grants, federal transportation and enhancement funds, and state and local private foundations, such as Colorado Springs Health Foundation.



Figure 31 - Funded through a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Grant, Crew Members from Mile High Youth Corps Build Singletrack Trail by Hand in Pineries Open Space

Volunteer Programs – Programs such as Adopt-a-Park and Friends Groups may be created with and supported by the residents, businesses, and/or organizations located in the park’s vicinity. These programs allow volunteers to actively assist in improving and maintaining parks, related facilities, and the

community in which they live, thus allowing the community to have an active investment in their parks, trails, and open spaces.

In addition, volunteers, citizens, and local business owners provide generous funding for ongoing park operations, either through volunteer hours or through various methods of financial support. Each year, volunteers donate approximately 20,000 hours of service to El Paso County Parks and its nature centers, worth an estimated \$544,000. Over the last five years, the successful Partners in the Park program raised \$195,000, while donations to the Trust for County Parks has totaled \$300,000 during the same time period. These funds reduce financial strain while at the same time providing for enhanced educational programs, greater maintenance, and improved recreational amenities throughout the park system.

In the case of Homestead Ranch Regional Park, volunteer and Friends Groups could be established to assist in the ongoing improvement and maintenance of trails, interpretive displays, and overlooks, as well as conducting clean-up and noxious weed management programs. Volunteer-based programs such as these illustrate the creative efforts that have been undertaken to continue to provide park and recreational services while boosting the available funding to improve and maintain parks, trails, and open space.



Figure 32– Citizen Volunteers Build Singletrack Trail at Pineries Open Space as part of a Rocky Mountain Field Institute Volunteer Day

Additional Funding Opportunities

In addition to the current and more recognizable funding sources listed above, additional funding opportunities may be available to supplement existing funds. Examples of these are recreation service fees, naming rights, payments for utility and telecommunication infrastructure on park property, merchandising, gifts in perpetuity, bonds, real estate and assessment fees, leases and easements, permits and licensing rights, and various federal park and open space funds. These additional funding opportunities are explained in detail in Chapter 3 of the 2022 El Paso County Parks Master Plan.

Capital Improvement Costs and Phasing

The phasing, or prioritization, of capital improvement projects for Homestead Ranch Regional Park was derived through the stakeholder and public input process, as well as continuing collaboration with Master Plan Team members. An initial capital improvement budget for new and improved facilities and critical maintenance needs was developed. Benefit for cost, project complexity, and improvement urgency were considered in project prioritization.

The following tables include a project name, a description of proposed action items, and estimated capital improvement costs which is based on recent projects. The capital improvement costs are broken out into 'Phase I Improvements' and 'Future Improvements' which will be completed dependent on available funding and planned in accordance with the EPC Parks Capital Improvement Program.

Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan Capital Improvement Costs - Phase I		
Project	Description	Estimated Cost (2022 USD)
Signage	Standard park entry sign, trail courtesy, park rules, private trail easement signage	\$5,000
Tier I Trail Improvements	Tier I crushed limestone trail surfacing and improvements ~6,700 feet of trail	\$100,000
Drainage and Ditching at Parking Lot	Install new culvert and ditching, rip rap at outfall	\$25,000
ADA Parking	3 concrete ADA parking stalls (one van accessible)	\$30,000
Fencing and Property survey	Install new wildlife friendly fencing at south property line (5,000' long). Survey entire perimeter and secure fencing where needed.	\$40,000
*Forestry Management Phase I	Selective thinning, removal of ladder fuels, and dwarf mistletoe mitigation.	\$120,000
Total Costs		\$320,000

*2022 project

Table 1 – Proposed Phase I Improvements and Estimated Costs

Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan Capital Improvement Costs - Future Phases		
Project	Description	Estimated Cost (2022 USD)
Tier III Trail Improvements	Tier III crushed limestone trail surfacing and improvements ~9,000 feet of trail	\$125,000
Tier IV Trail Decommissioning	Decommission ~1,600' of single-track trail	\$16,000
Tier IV Trail, Southwest Realignment	Decommission ~1,600' of single-track trail. Construct 3,600' of new single track in SW corner of park	\$55,000
Tier IV Trail, East Lower Loop	Construct 3,300' of new single track a lower east ridgeline	\$45,000
Tier IV Trail, Rattlesnake Butte	Construct 6,600' of new single track trail from the lower ridgeline through Rattlesnake Butte	\$100,000
Site Furnishings	(4) new brown perforated metal benches with shade, (5) new bear proof trash cans	\$34,000
Landscape upgrades at Playground	New shade trees, boulders and perennials. Includes irrigation extension.	\$30,000
Parking Lot Paving	Pave 30,000 SF of auto parking area, 5" asphalt	\$150,000
Soil Analysis & Turf Management for Active Use Field	Soil test, soil amendment, fine grading, and overseed the existing 300' x 400' field	\$100,000
Material Storage Bins	5 new material storage bins and maintenance yard improvements	\$100,000
Add Gravel to Trailhead Drive	Install 4" lift of gravel to entry drive (24' wide x 2,500' long)	\$70,000
Pond Water Quality	Analyze pond and water for suitable fish habitat, improve pond for fishing	\$55,000
Forestry Management	Future phases for selective thinning, removal of ladder fuels, and dwarf mistletoe mitigation	\$400,000
Playground Renovation	Replace playground when it reaches the end of its useful life	\$800,000
Automatic Gates at Entry	Install two automatic security gates at main entry to park.	\$80,000
Total Costs		\$2,160,000

Table 2 – Proposed Future Phase Improvements and Estimated Costs

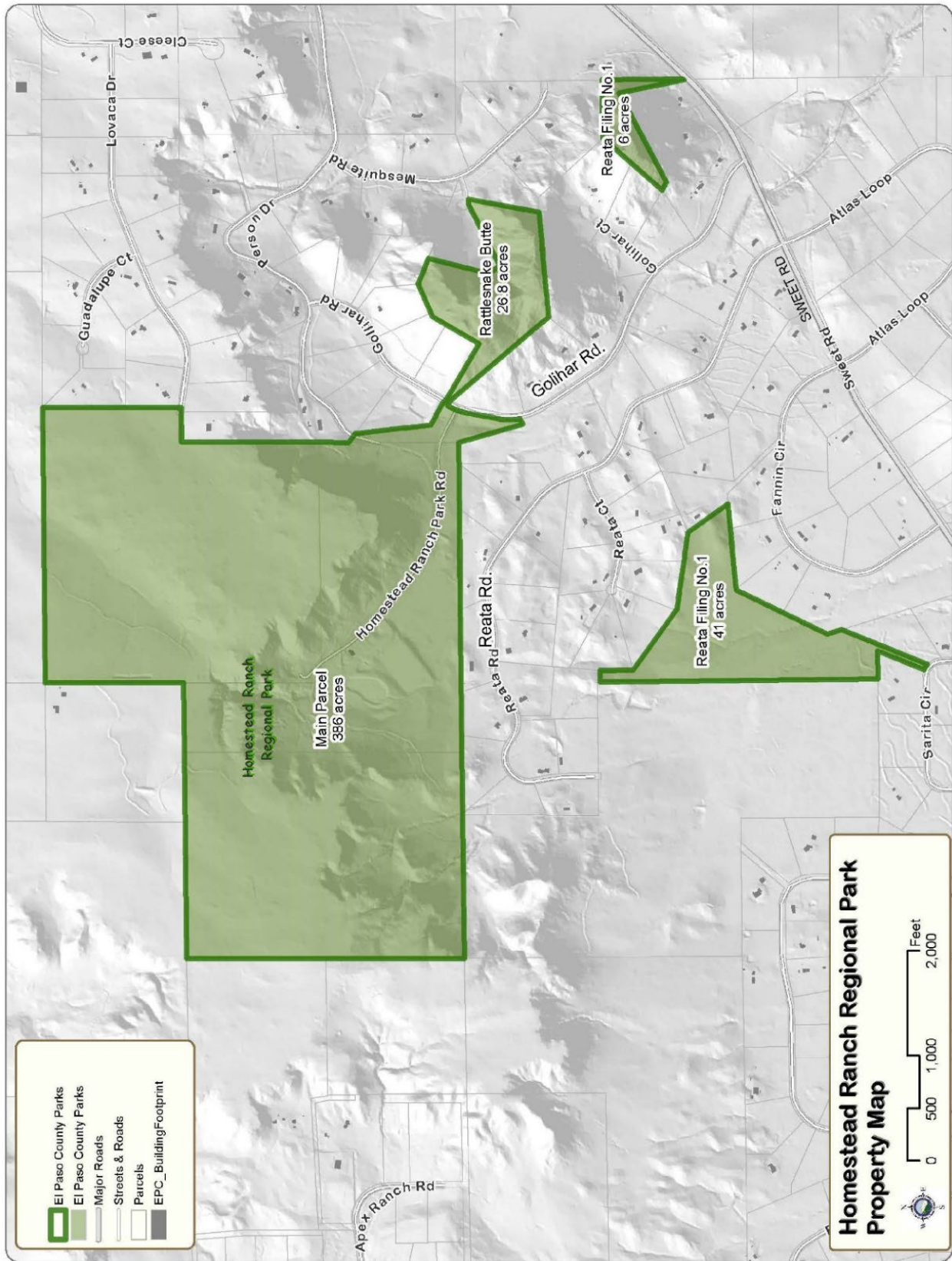
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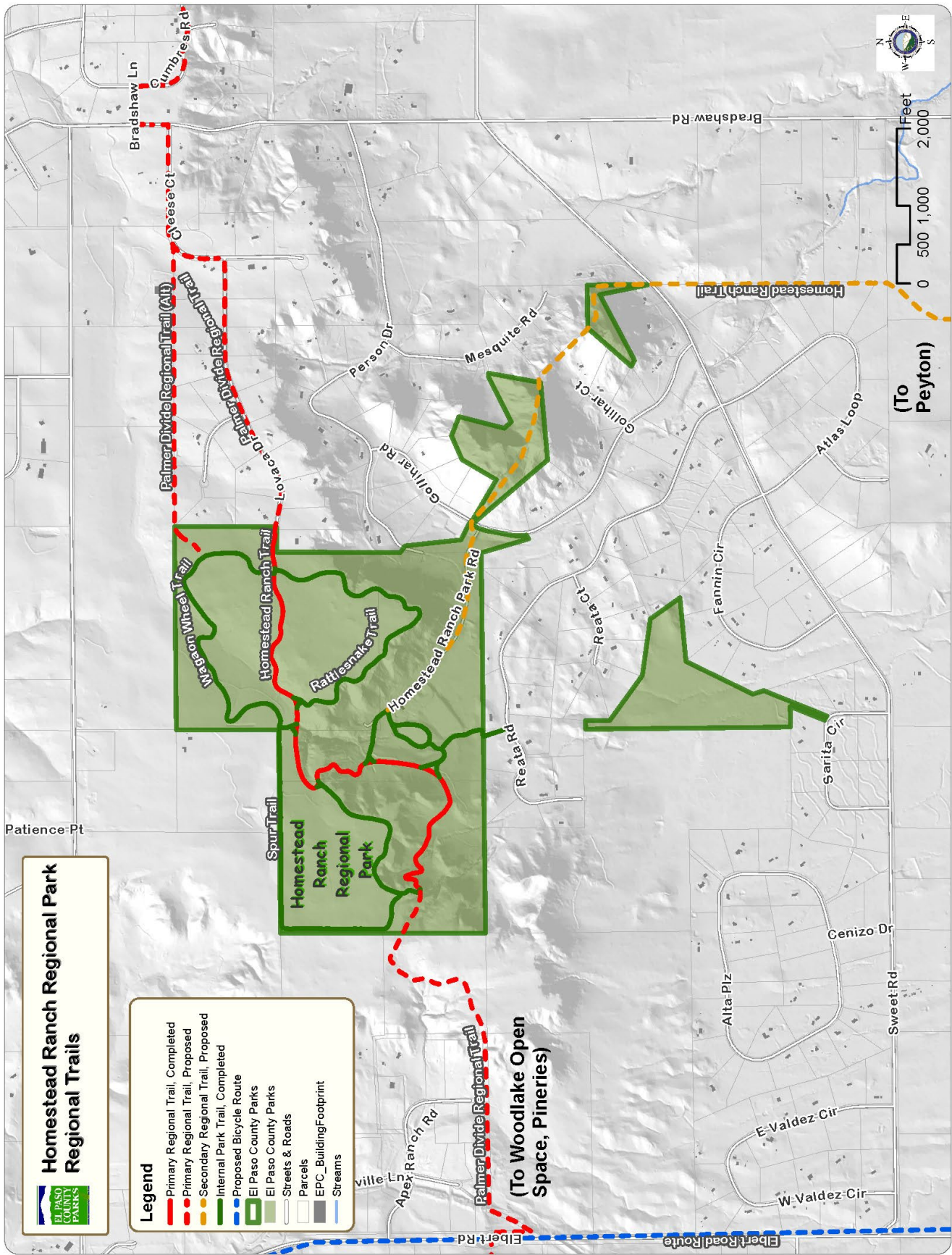
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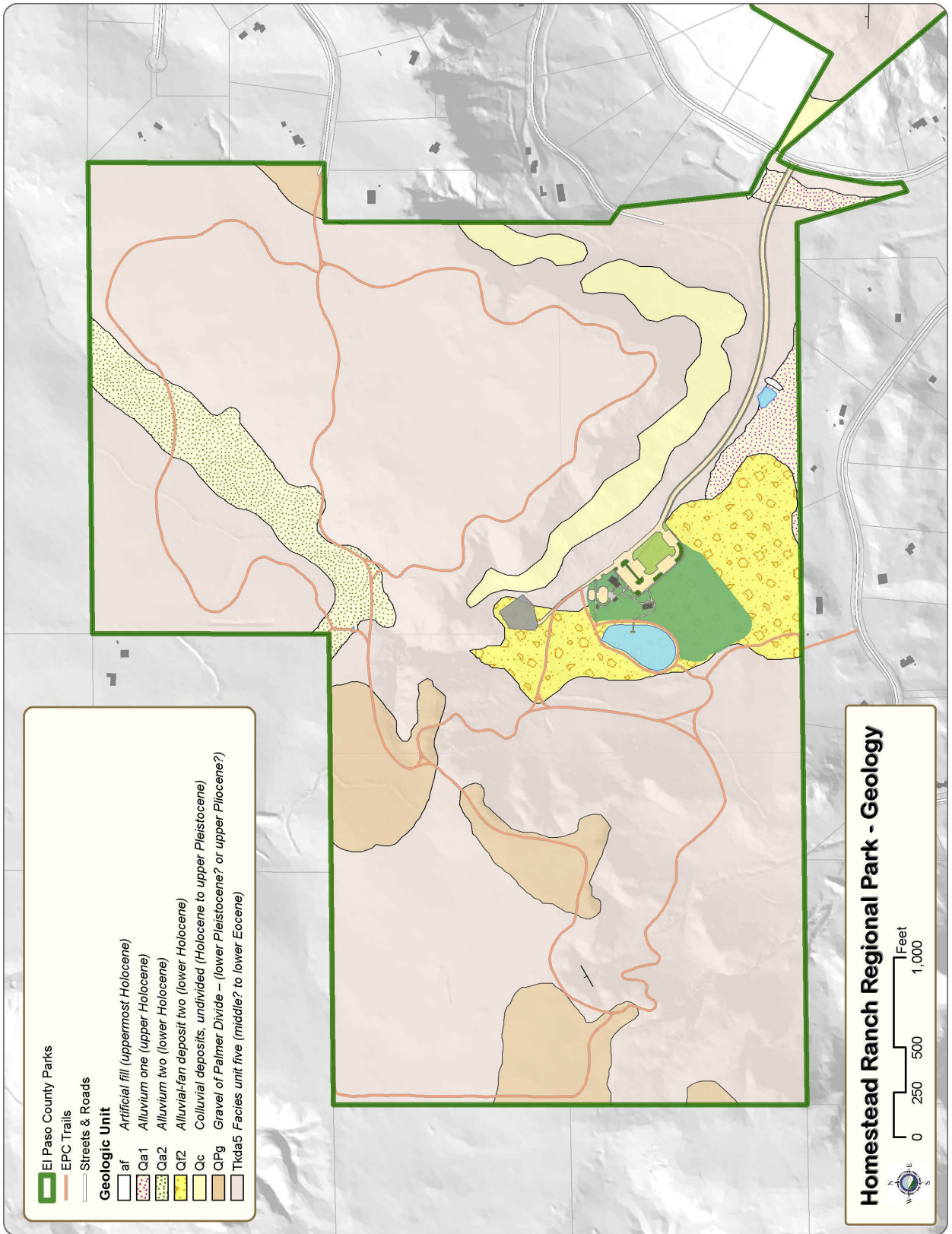
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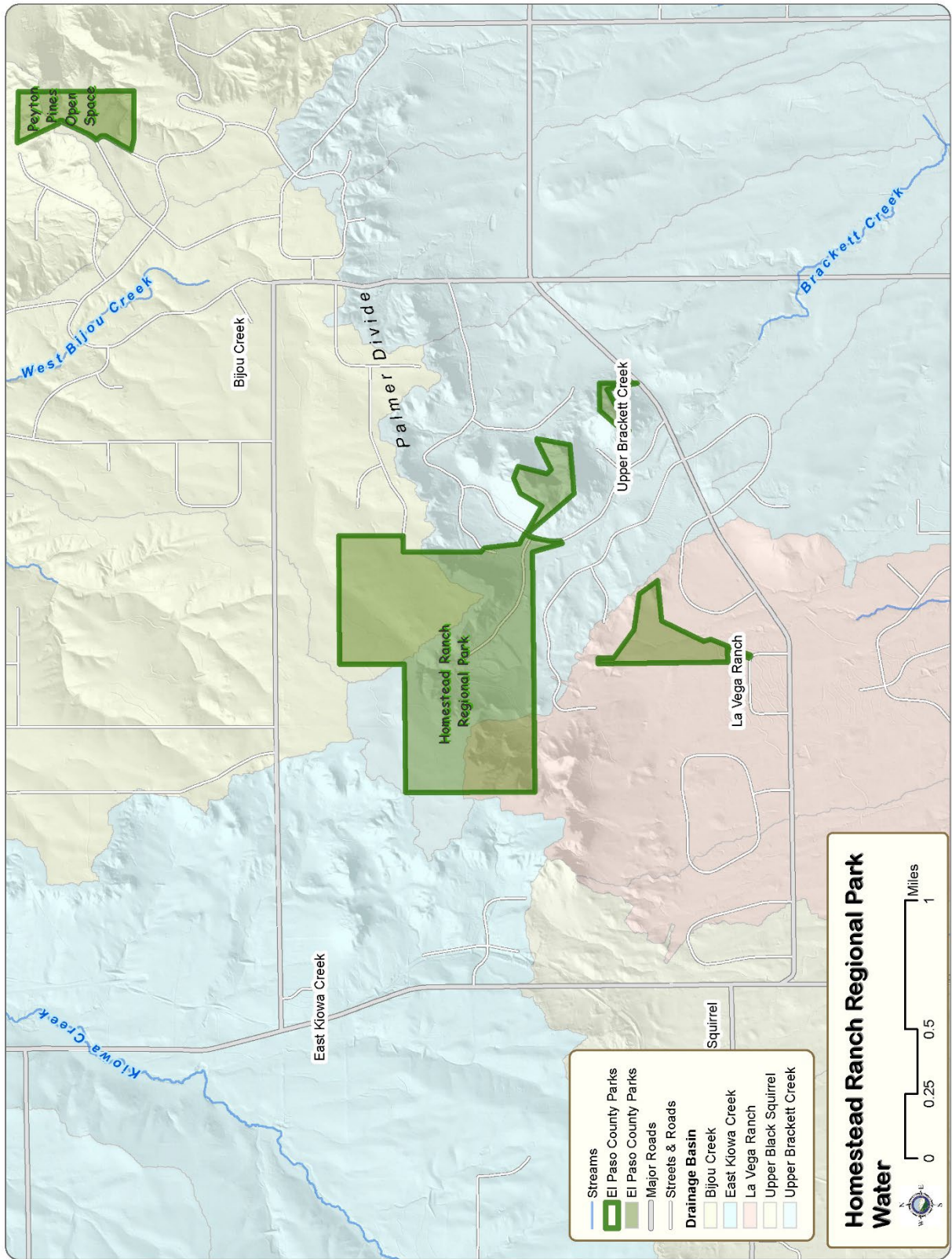
Map 6 – Homestead Ranch Property Map



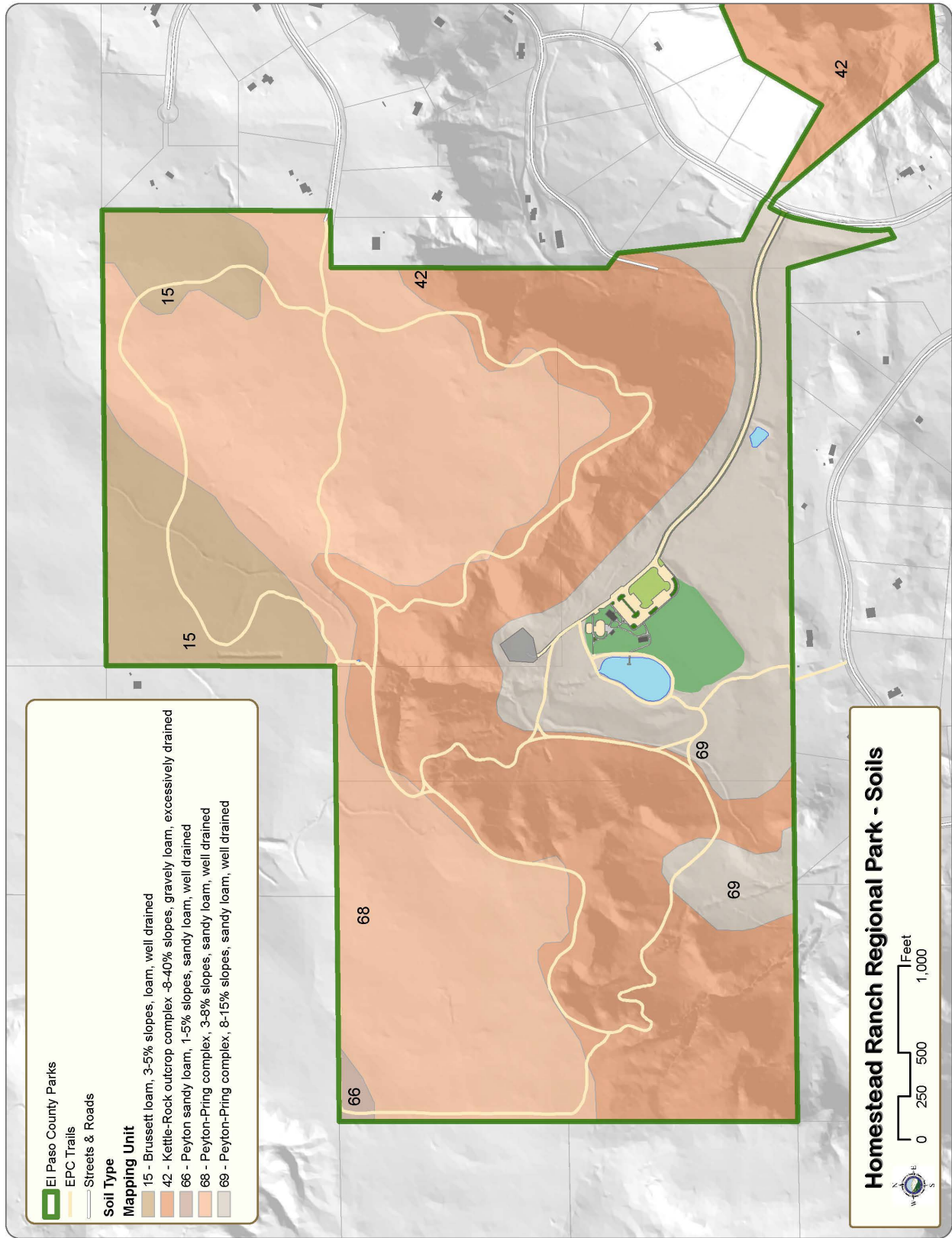
Map 7 – Regional Trail Connections



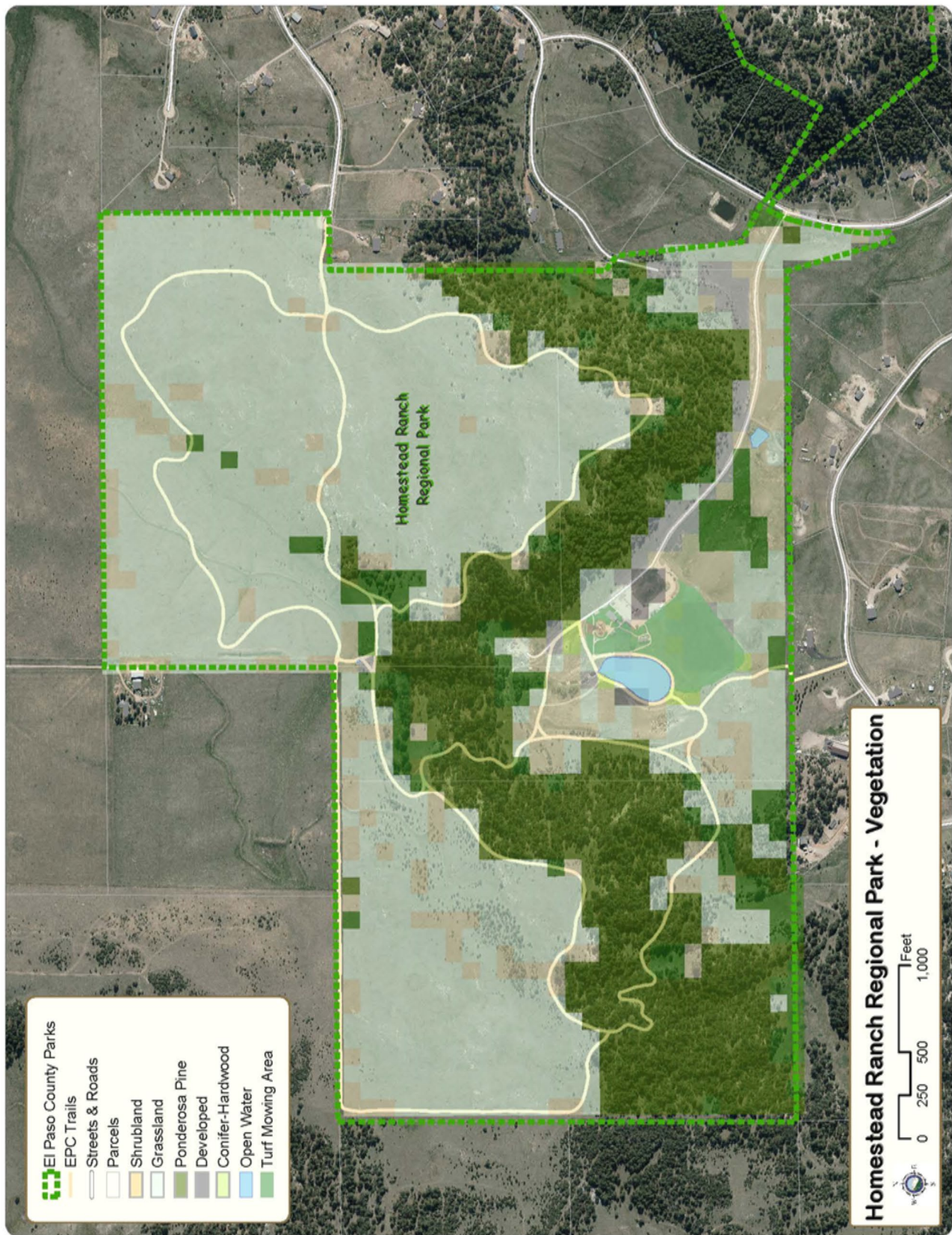
Map 8 – Homestead Ranch Geology (USGS)



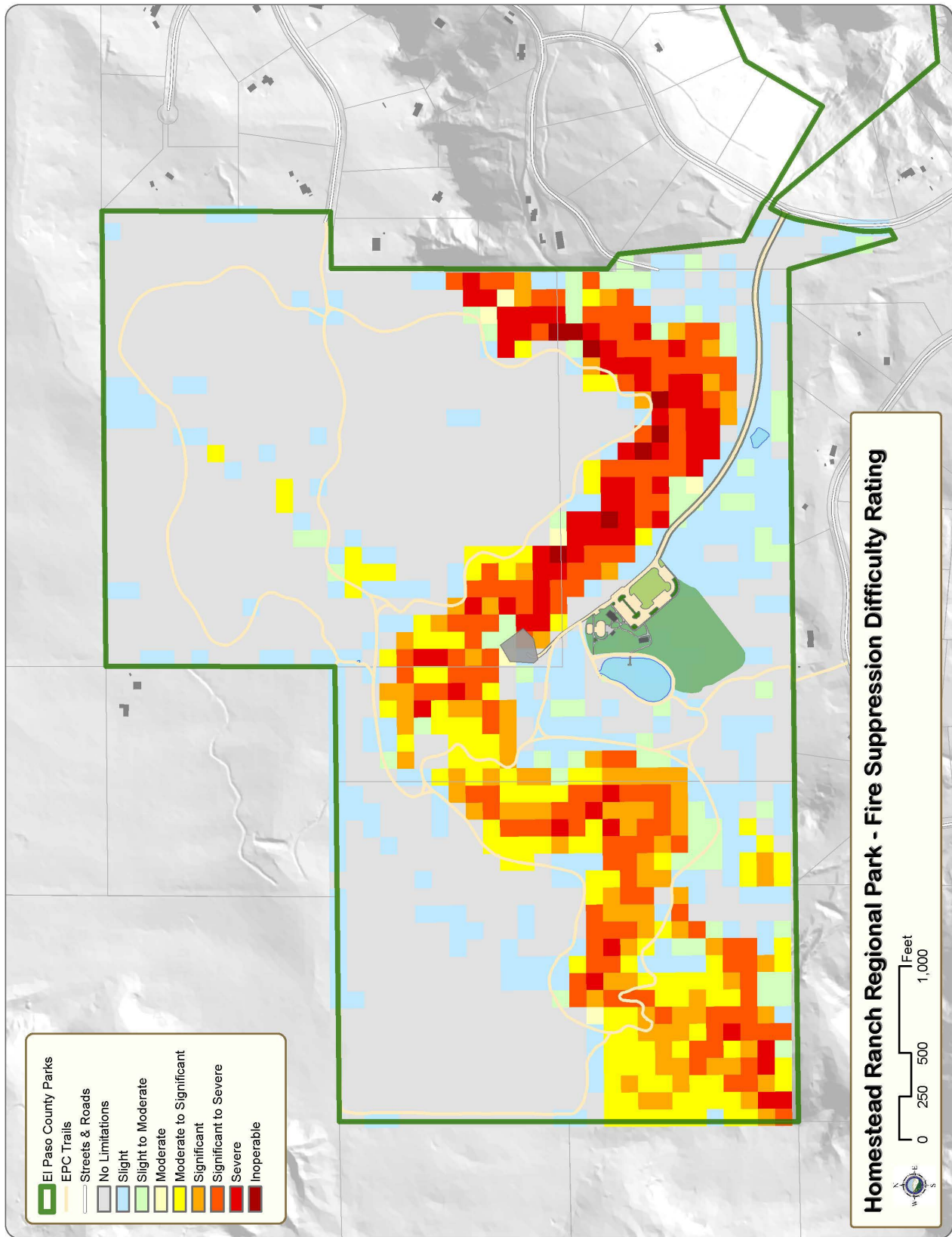
Map 9– Homestead Ranch Water (USGS)



Map 10- Homestead Ranch Soils (USDA)



Map 11– Homestead Ranch Vegetation (Colorado State Forest Service, 2021)



Map 12– Homestead Ranch Fire Suppression Difficulty (Colorado State Forest Service, 2021)

~Appendix ~

~ Public Review of Draft Master Plan ~

On **June 3rd, 2022**, the public was invited to review the draft version of the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan. Potential reviewers were notified via email blasts, an official press release, and social media posts. The invitation and press release are shown on the following pages. Additionally, local parks, trails, and open space organizations also shared the invitation via email and social media outlets, thus reaching more possible reviewers. The review period was open for four weeks, concluding at the close of business on **July 8th**, although comments were gladly received well into July 2022.

At the conclusion of the review period, a total of 34 individual responses were received, many from representatives from local recreation and land stewardship organizations. These included:

- Trails and Open Space Coalition
- Black Forest Trails Association
- Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates

Comments received from the public review process ranged from straightforward and often enthusiastic approval to questions regarding trail planning, trespassing on adjacent private property and fish stocking, and suggestions for a more accessible and enjoyable horseback riding experience.

What People Like

- “Beautiful, amazing views”
- “Calm and quiet, interesting birds”
- “Good walking trails and small pond”
- “Good playground for kids”
- “Secluded”
- “Pavilions are great for get-togethers”
- My kids love this park. The playground is so big for them to play on. There are covered picnic tables, hiking trails, an open field to play soccer or fly kites, and a beautiful pond.
- “A hidden gem!”
- “Great place to ride. Parking area spacious with easy trailer access. Neat, well-maintained trails with water for horses, ample rest and picnic areas”

What People Don't Like

- "Concert in the park too loud"
- "Gollihar Rd. is in poor condition since the park was built." "Traffic is too fast on Gollihar."
- "People don't clean up after horses"
- "People need to pick up dog waste"
- "People don't yield to horses"
- "Dirt road washboarding makes for a bumpy ride"
- "Not many fish, need to restock"
- "Restrooms are locked during winter"
- "Trails up to the buttes would encourage trespassing on private property, trash, noise"
- "Illegal Camp fires, camping and improper cigarette disposal in park"

Public Recommendations

- Increase recreation for the field area
- Monitor the health of the fishing ponds
- Complete the rim trail into a loop
- Install interpretive signage to incorporate history
- Discontinue concerts in the park
- No trail extension to Rattlesnake Butte
- Build a disc golf course
- Fire mitigation is a good idea and overdue
- Trail surfacing should be horse-friendly
- Use smooth wire fencing to delineate property lines not barbed which is used to contain stock
- Paving parking lot not needed
- Clearly mark private access easements (no public access)
- Improve regulatory signage

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Board of County Commissioners
Holly Williams, District 1
Carrie Geitner, District 2
Stan VanderWerf, District 3
Longinos Gonzalez, Jr, District 4
Cami Bremer, District 5

News Release

El Paso County Parks Invites the Public To Review the Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan

El Paso County, CO, June 3rd, 2022 – El Paso County

El Paso County Parks invites the public to review the draft Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan. The Master Plan provides guidance for the next seven to ten years for capital improvements, construction of open space amenities, implementation of educational programs, and operations and maintenance.

Located at the edge of Black Forest this 458 acre regional park has diverse topography ranging from rolling, open meadows to tree-covered bluffs running the length of the park. A natural spring-fed pond and creek in the central valley of the park attracts deer, coyotes, foxes, fishing and over 35 types of waterfowl and birds. The park includes a playground, a playing field and picnic pavilions. Equestrian riders can water their horses at the trough while enjoying over 5 miles of trails throughout the park.

The draft Master Plan is available to review at the following online locations:

- Direct Link: https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/wp-content/uploads/Parks_Planning/HRRP-Master-Plan-Web-DRAFT.pdf
- Homestead Ranch Webpage: <https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/parks-and-recreation/homestead-ranch-regional-park/>
- Park Planning Webpage: <https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/parks-planning/>

A public hike hosted by El Paso County Parks will be held at Homestead Ranch Regional Park on **Friday, June 24 at 2:00 pm**. This is an opportunity to take a guided hike and provide input for the Master Plan.

Please send your comments to Greg Stachon, El Paso County Community Services Landscape Architect via email at GregStachon@elpasoco.com by **Friday, July 8th**.



***You Are Invited to Review the Draft
Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan!***

El Paso County Parks invites you to download and review the draft Homestead Ranch Regional Park Master Plan. The plan addresses conservation, trails, open space, recreation and cultural services needs, so El Paso County Parks can continue to provide the facilities and services that citizens value. The Master Plan provides guidance for the next seven to ten years for capital improvements, construction of open space amenities, implementation of educational programs, and operations and maintenance.



The draft Master Plan is available to download in Adobe PDF format at the following online locations:

- **Direct Link:** https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/wp-content/uploads/Parks_Planning/HRRP-Master-Plan-Web-DRAFT.pdf
- **Homestead Ranch Webpage:** <https://communityservices.elpasoco.com/parks-and-recreation/homestead-ranch-regional-park/>
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Please send your comments to Greg Stachon, El Paso County Community Services Landscape Architect via email at GregStachon@elpasoco.com by **Friday, July 8th**. Thank you!

Figure 34 - Email Invitation for Public Review of Draft Santa Fe Open Space Master Plan