

## Project Narrative and Community Impact Report

**Applicant:** Douglas County Open Space & Natural Resources & Douglas County Public Works Engineering (PW Engineering)

### Staff

**Persons:** Amy Knopp, Project Manager, Open Space  
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**Project:** Spruce Mountain Hwy 105 Parking Lot & Trails

### Project

**Purpose:** A Location and Extent to enable the County to improve public access, enhance the visitor experience by creating additional non-motorized trails and equestrian parking at Spruce Mountain Open Space.

### Background & Description:

Spruce Mountain Open Space is located in Douglas County, Colorado, along the foothills about 4.5 miles south of the Post Office in Larkspur along Spruce Mountain Road. The eastern portion of the property borders Spruce Mountain Road, and the west property line borders Highway 105 (aka S. Perry Park Road).

In 2007 Spruce Mountain Open Space was opened to the public. The property is 932-acres and has 8.5 miles of natural surface trails for passive non-motorized recreation such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Several years ago, the original parking lot was expanded in response to public safety concerns from people parking along Spruce Mountain Road's shoulders. However, the current parking lot cannot accommodate horse trailers. *Meaning equestrians must park off-site and ride an additional 2 miles (round trip) to access the property and trail system.*

Spruce Mountain Open Space a popular destination because of the impressive trail system and stunning views. *Notably, visitation increased by nearly 92% in 2020 as compared to 2019.* Stated differently, 23,595 more visitors enjoyed Spruce Mountain in 2020 than the previous year. It is necessary to create equestrian parking, provide additional car parking, a trailhead with amenities, and construct new natural surface trails connected to the current trail system.

## **Current Proposed Uses:**

This Location and Extent is for the Spruce Mountain West Trailhead Project. (*See attached Exhibit*)

Douglas County proposes constructing a driveway, trailhead, approximately 2 acres of a gravel parking lot, trails, and an adventure play area on the western portion of the property along S. Perry Park Rd. This Project is necessary to provide equestrian parking (for the first time), increase car parking, and enhance accessibility for the adjoining Spruce Mountain Estate and other neighborhoods along the southern portion of Highway 105. New trails will be constructed to connect the trailhead to the current trail system.

The Spruce Mountain West trailhead, driveway, new trails, and future amenities will be modeled after the successful Sandstone Ranch Open Space trailhead and consistent with other Open Space trailheads. Attributes will be developed in phases.

## **Phases:**

Phase 1 (see attached Exhibit):

- Repurposed oil field fencing and rocks to line the driveway and parking lot;
- Appropriate landscaping to improve the viewshed;
- Picnic tables and benches;
- Hitch rails for equestrians;
- Parking lot signage (will be limited);
- An electric gate to limit use as defined in the rules and regulations (Resolution 013-153);
- Concrete pad for handicap parking;
- Kiosk to post wayfinding, interpretation, education, and regulatory signs;
- Enclosure for the porta-potties and dumpster; and
- Trails to connect with the existing trail system.

Future Phase (see attached Exhibit):

- A trail with an improved surface to enhance accessibility,
- Picnic shelter/pavilion, and
- Adventure Play Area.

## **Trail:**

The newly constructed trails will meander across the landscape through the meadows, Gambel Oak, and pine trees. While the attached Exhibit highlights potential trails, the final design will be determined after completing a surface cultural study and consultation with a trail design and construction expert. Trails are natural surface and constructed to be 5 feet wide where possible to accommodate passive recreation, non-motorized recreation such as hiking, equestrians, mountain biking of differing skills and abilities, and maintenance and emergency vehicles.

## **Trailhead:**

The proposed trailhead location was selected by traffic engineers to ensure proper sight distance along Highway 105, a relatively flat area, and not visible to the Spruce Mountain Estates

neighbors. The two-acre parking lot will accommodate passenger vehicles and horse trailers and is proposed to be located approximately 200 feet from Highway 105 with a single entrance and a two-way 24-foot gravel access road. The speed limit on Highway 105 is 45 MPH. Confirm this speed).

It is anticipated that the trailhead usage will be similar to the nearby Sandstone Ranch and Dawson Butte Open Spaces: 25 vehicles/weekday, 134 vehicles/weekend, 54 cars per U.S. Holiday. While there will be increased traffic on Highway 105, the property's size and the trails being non-motorized and located away from the highway; there should be minimal impact on the surrounding community. The Project will directly benefit the Spruce Mountain Estates subdivision because it will reduce visitors' parking within their community to gain access to Spruce Mountain.

The construction plans, GESC report, and drainage report will be submitted for review and approval to PW Engineering staff before construction.

**Community Impacts:**

The new Spruce Mountain trailhead and parking lot will serve the adjacent community of Spruce Mountain Estates to the south, Valley Park to the north, and other neighborhoods to the west and north. This Project is greatly extending trail opportunities for nearby residents. The adjacent community to the south will benefit from the Project in two ways. First, they will have direct access to the trail system. Second, people will no longer park in the neighborhood and hike into the property by having a new public parking area.

As stated above, the Project is intended to provide parking for horse trailers along with hikers and mountain bikers who desire to access the trail network from the west side of Spruce Mountain Open Space. For the first time, the parking lot will provide a centralized point for horse trailer parking for the Spruce Mountain Open Space.

**Compliance with Comprehensive Master Plan:**

Policy 3-2D.3 Develop local trail systems and a regional, interconnected system of multi-use trails that links communities, recreation areas, open space, neighborhood trails, and trail systems, including those outside Douglas County.

- ✓ This proposed trail network meets the above criteria by providing direct access to the trail for the adjoining neighborhood, communities along with Highway 105, and Douglas County citizens.

Policy 3-3F.9 Development along major roads in the West Plum Creek Subarea should be carefully sited and designed to minimize visual impacts, particularly to the foothills, Front Range, mountain views, and open meadows.

- ✓ The proposed Project will be designed to work with the landscape and topography to balance public safety, natural resource management, and public access while limiting impacts to the viewshed. Being approximately 200 feet from Highway 105, the

trailhead will be visible. Having the parking lot visible is desirable for security purposes.

Policy 4-1C.4 Establish limited, low-impact passive recreation opportunities, including hiking, bird watching, road cycling, equestrian trails, and picnicking.

- ✓ The proposed trails will provide spectacular views and various trail experiences, including interpretive and educational opportunities and possibly in the future an adventure play area (see the attached Exhibit). Interpretive signage along the trail can speak to the history of the ranching, preservation of wildlife habitat, and the positive impacts of forestry health and hazardous fuels projects on the landscape, adjoining landowners, and the greater community.

Section 1806.03 of the Zoning Resolution Floodplain Overlay District indicates uses permitted by right as "recreational uses not requiring structures or fences, including parks, golf courses, driving ranges, picnic grounds, wildlife and natural reserves, game farms, target ranges, trap and skeet ranges, hunting, fishing, and hiking areas".

- ✓ The proposed trails will be natural surface throughout the Project; future trails may be located crossing the floodplain and will utilize existing roads, bridges, and crossings. No structures within the floodplain are contemplated.

Policy 10-1A.4 Minimize and mitigate land use impacts to wildlife and important movement corridors, to the maximum extent practicable.

- ✓ The citizens of Douglas County expect to enjoy the lands purchased with the open space sales and use tax by having access to those lands. It is a delicate balance to provide public access and still protect the conservation values for which the properties are acquired. The public may access the property from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset, which benefits the wildlife because they are not disturbed overnight. Also, a natural surface trail has the least impact on wildlife of other alternatives, as does the restriction to strictly non-motorized use.

**Compliance with Board of County Commissioners Core Priorities:**

Historic & Natural Resources – Preservation, Protection, Promotion of Resource Stewardship, and Public Access.

**Compliance with Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan (PTOS):**

The PTOS Plan is an adopted sub-element of Douglas County’s 2030 Comprehensive Master Plan. This Project achieves the following PTOS Goals and Objectives:

Goal OS 2. Provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of Douglas County Open Space Properties.

Objective OS 2A. Develop Access to County open space by creating trails and trailheads where appropriate while maintaining and amanging existing facilities.

- ✓ This Project, for the first time, creates equestrian parking at Spruce Mountain Open Space.

Objective OS 2B. Support development of passive outdoor recreational uses within designated areas, including but not limited to hiking, biking, horseback riding, fishing, and other compatible uses of open space in accordance with adopted County regulations, conservation easements, and the PTOS Sales and Use Tax .

- ✓ The citizens of Douglas County expect to be able to access Open Space properties and trail systems. This Project creates an additional public access point to the existing trail system and provides new trails. We anticipate this will improve the visitor experience by reducing congestion at the current trailhead and more evenly distributed trail use throughout the trail system.

Goal OS3. Protect County open space resources through conservation and management practices for future generations.

Objective OS A3. Acknowledge the need to accompdte growth by balancing open space acquisitions and protection with the needs of growing communities.

- ✓ As noted before, visitation to Spruce Mountian Open Space dramatically increased in 2020 as compared the the previous year. It is important to provide adequate parking and trails for the citizens in order to disperse the use throughout the property.

Objective OS 3C. Develop site-specific land management plans to serve as basis for proposed site uses, protection measures, and management of open space lands.

Objective OS G3. Actively protect open space resources and enhance visitor safety.

- ✓ Eventhough the existing parking lot along Spruce Mountain Road was expanded it is often at capacity. On weekneds and holidays visitors park on the road's shoulder. This is a public safety concern. The additional parking enhance visitor safety because people will not be parking on the shoulder of a busy roadway.

Goal OS 4. Acquire, develop and manage open space resources through the efficient use of fiscal and operational strategies.

Objective OS 4C. Work with government and partner agencies to achieve mutal open space goals through cooperative acquisition, planning, development and management of open space.

- ✓ Open Space is partnering with Douglas County Public Works Engineering on this Project. They are providing engineered drawing and assistance with contracting and construction management.

Goal OS 5. Strengthen the opportunities for understanding and appreciation of open space and natural resources.

Objective OS 5B. Manage and extend resources by promoting and supporting community outreach, and educational, safety, and volunteer programs.

- ✓ Open Space volunteers contributed to the planning of the new trails for this Project. The volunteer Trail Crew will help with trail construction and long-term trail maintenance. The trailhead will provide interpretive and educational signs. In the future, the Naturalist and Interpretive volunteers will be invited to contribute to the Adventure Play Area.

**Proposed Construction Schedule for Phase 1:**

- April – Complete Location and Extent Process
- May/June – Quote process for road, parking lot, and trail construction
- May/June – Award trail construction contract
- June/July – September – Construct trail
- July/August – Award road and parking lot contract
- July – Road notice of construction
- Sept 1-15 – **Grand opening**