

Horse Gulch Management Plan

Final Draft: April 18, 2013

I. INTRODUCTION

This Plan provides a framework for the sound stewardship of the City of Durango Horse Gulch open space area. The Plan includes baseline information regarding the area, management objectives and policies; an overview of stewardship intentions; and an outline of how planned and newly proposed activities and improvements are evaluated and considered before they are implemented. The Horse Gulch Management Plan will be incorporated as an element of the City of Durango Natural Lands and Mountain Parks System-wide Management Effort.



II. DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Horse Gulch is part of a large open space and recreational area that includes the City of Durango's Skyridge open space, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Skyline and Grandview Ridge properties, as well as trail corridors passing through privately owned lands. La Plata County is a 1/3 owner of 240 acres in Horse Gulch. This entire landscape encompasses more than 3,600 acres and is home to the Telegraph and Horse Gulch Trail System—an approximately 60 mile natural-surface single-track trail network that is used extensively for non-motorized activities such as hiking, trail running, horse back riding, and most notably, mountain biking. While the open space in Horse Gulch and Skyridge remain open year round to public use, the BLM Grandview Ridge is subject to seasonal conditions-based closures for big game habitat protection.

City open space in the area, including Horse Gulch, Raider Ridge and Skyridge encompass more than 1,300 acres within 15 parcels and includes approximately 16 miles of natural-surface single-track trails. In total, 705 acres, or approximately 54 percent, is under conservation easement held by the La Plata Open Space Conservancy to protect recreational values and wildlife habitat. The remaining acreage is deed restricted as open space and recreational lands. The 705 acres were acquired through 3 separate phases with the assistance of Great Outdoors Colorado funding. As a result, there are 3 separate conservation easements in place across this acreage. Each easement provides very consistent language to one another, and specifically identifies allowable and prohibited uses. The conservation easements are the basis of this Management Plan and are included in the Horse Gulch Baseline Documentation which is

available for review at the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department and on the City website. A map of lands preserved in Horse Gulch, including those under easement, is attached to this plan.

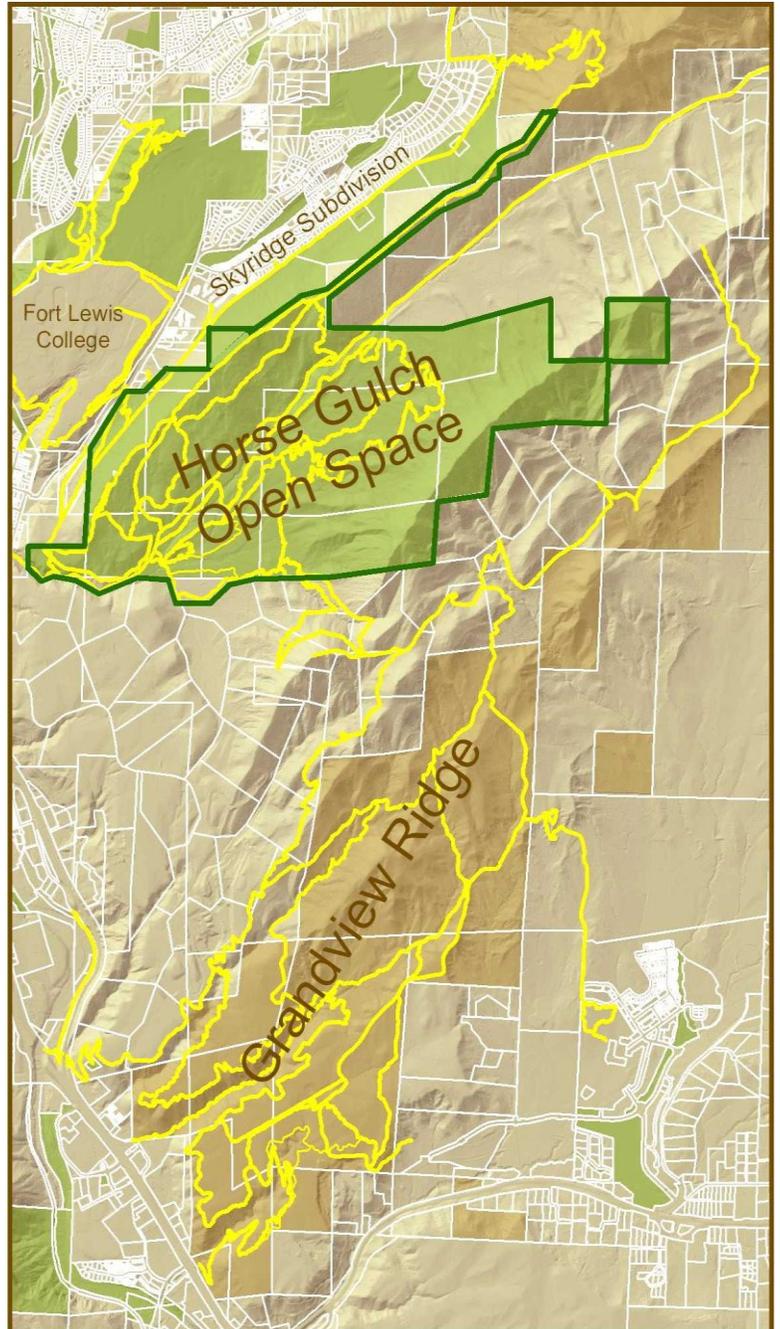
III. BASELINE DOCUMENTATION

Significant baseline data has been collected on Horse Gulch that includes mineral and environmental assessments, vegetation and photo baseline documentation; habitat preservation values and a range of geographic and historical information collected by both the La Plata Open Space Conservancy and Fort Lewis College. This information is included in the Horse Gulch Baseline Documentation.

IV. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

It is the intent of the City of Durango to manage Horse Gulch open space in a manner that will:

- Maintain the open space as primarily undeveloped and in a natural state for non-motorized recreational uses and wildlife habitat.
- Improve the natural condition of the property by eliminating invasive and noxious weeds and plant species; minimize erosion caused by ongoing trail activities; and conduct wild fire fuels reduction activities as necessary to protect the ecological value of the property.
- Maintain and improve the trail system and ancillary amenities including new trails (to improve connectivity and functionality), trailheads, and signage.
- Ensure compliance with conservation easements held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy.



V. SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT POLICIES

1. Management activities shall be consistent with this adopted Plan. Proposed activities deemed inconsistent with the Management Plan shall be circulated to the appropriate City Departments and Advisory Boards for review and comment prior to any action being taken. Proposed activities on acreage under conservation easement shall also be reviewed by La Plata Open Space Conservancy (LPOSC). Proposed activities on acreage owned in part by La Plata County will be forwarded to the County for their review.
2. Proposed changes to the Management Plan shall be circulated to the appropriate City Departments and Advisory Boards for review and comment prior to any action being taken. Changes proposed for acreage under conservation easement shall also be reviewed by La Plata Open Space Conservancy. Proposed Plan changes on acreage owned in part by La Plata County will be forwarded to the County for their review.
3. The property shall be maintained in its natural state with public recreational use limited to trail-oriented activities consistent with the requirements of this Plan and the recorded conservation easements (walking; hiking; jogging; bicycling; cross country skiing; snow shoeing; equestrians, and environmental education).
4. All uses/activities on the property shall be subject to City Park and Open Space rules and regulations. The City shall be responsible for enforcement of all regulations. The following uses/activities shall be specifically prohibited on the property:
 - Overnight Camping
 - Camp fires
 - Hunting or discharge of firearms/weapons
 - Organized and special events except by permit
 - Dogs off leash
 - Injury to or molestation of birds, game or wildlife
 - Unauthorized motorized vehicles
 - Unauthorized construction of trails, berms, jumps, or other recreational structures
 - Destruction or removal of soils, rocks, natural vegetation or other materials except for purposes of property maintenance and improvements consistent with this Plan.
 - Other resource disturbing activities such as construction of forts, tree houses, seating areas, lean-tos and other man-made structures without prior City approval.
5. Improvements on the property shall be limited to:
 - A. **Trails:** Formalization, improvement and maintenance of the existing trail system and construction of new trails is allowed provided that improvements or additions to the trail system are consistent with conservation values established for the area. All proposals for new or modified trails will be presented to City staff and Advisory Boards for consideration. Trail proposals affecting property under conservation easement will also be forwarded to LPOSC for consideration. The trail system will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is in good condition and is in compliance with this Plan. A map of the existing trail system within Horse Gulch is attached as an appendix to the Plan.

Development and maintenance of the trail system has historically been undertaken in coordination with Trails 2000.

B. **System Access:** Pedestrian access into Horse Gulch is gained from multiple locations as shown on the attached map. There is no public motor vehicle access allowed into Horse Gulch without permission of the City of Durango.

C. **Parking/Trailhead Improvements:** Motor vehicle parking is available at the east end of 3rd Street at the entrance to the limited-use and gated CR 237 (it is closed to public motor vehicles). A paved trailhead parking lot will be developed by the City in this location to accommodate 18 vehicles. Parking is also available on many City streets adjacent to other system access points. Parking accommodations for equestrians and others large vehicles is available at the Bureau of Land Management Sale Barn Trailhead.

D. **Signage** on the property may include:

- Rules, regulations, and way finding at trailheads, trail intersections, and other key locations
- Interpretive and educational signage
- Temporary, seasonal, or other signage as deemed appropriate for the protection and maintenance of the resource

E. **Other Improvements:** Other improvements may include picnic and restroom facilities provided that the installation of such facilities and improvements minimizes disturbance to existing vegetation, and are not detrimental to the conservation values of the property or intent of this Plan.

F. **Additional Lands:** The City shall evaluate and consider the acquisition of additional open space lands adjacent to Horse Gulch consistent with the City of Durango Comprehensive Plan.

6. The City will routinely patrol the property, and at its discretion, may elect from time to time to temporarily close the entire property, or selected areas of the property, when it is deemed necessary for the protection of the property's natural resource values, the general public, and/or for rejuvenation of specific resources including wildlife habitat and vegetation.
7. Property assessments may be taken from time to time to determine the specific location, type, and quantities of unique plant and animal habitat/species, and unique natural or archeological features in advance of any stewardship activities consistent with this Management Plan.
8. La Plata Open Space Conservancy shall provide annual monitoring reports of parcels under conservation easement to assist the City with stewardship efforts.
9. Environmental education and research projects may be conducted on the property with advance approval by the City.

10. Special requests for public motor vehicle access along the closed section of Horse Gulch Road to accommodate individuals with special accessibility needs will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the City and La Plata County.

VI. STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITIES

Routine Maintenance: Routine maintenance will be based on regular inspection and need. Typical ongoing maintenance shall include weed mitigation, fire mitigation, trash removal, erosion control, vandalism repair, trail and road repair and improvements, and other facility repair or maintenance as needed.

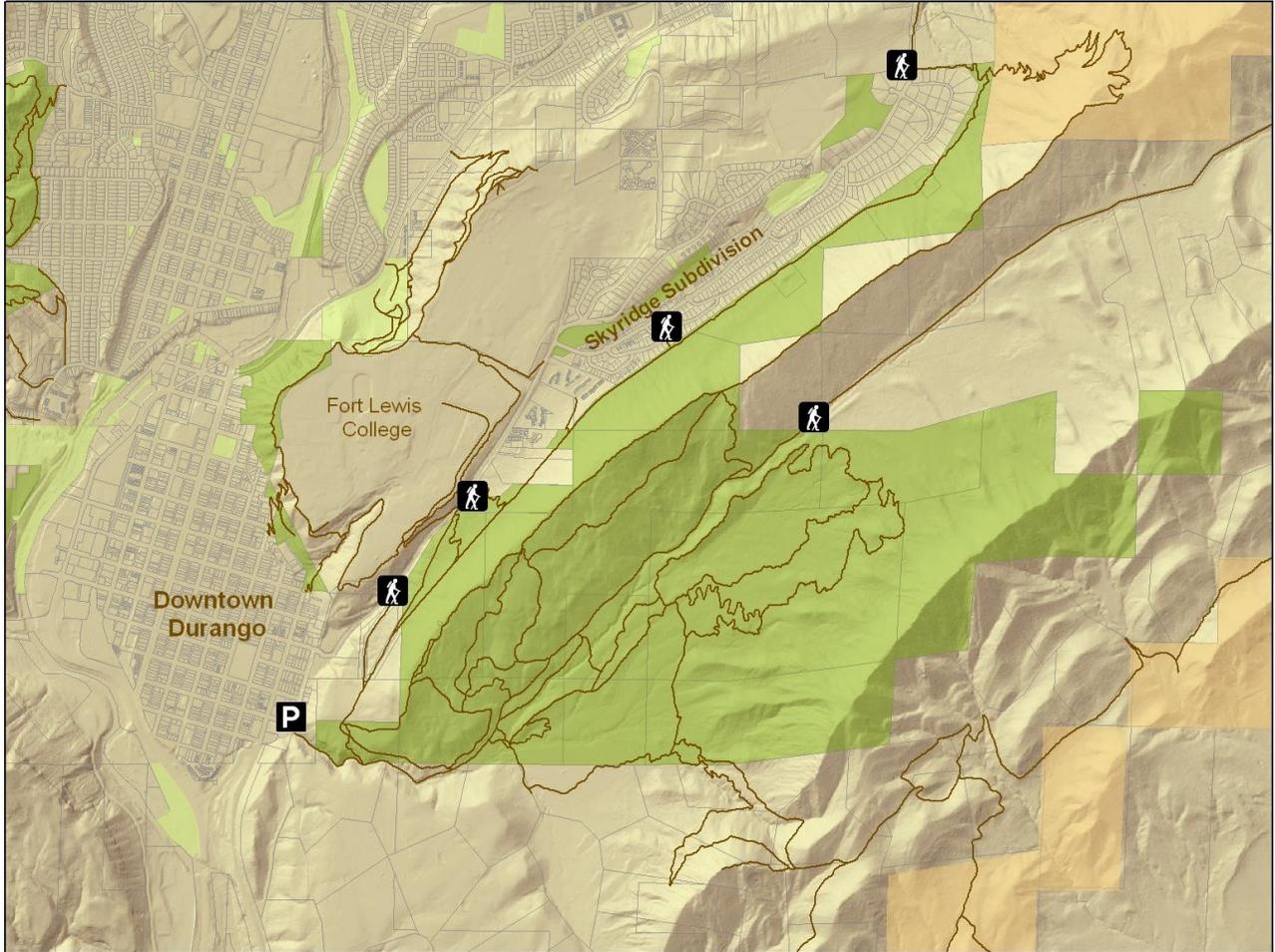
Flora and Fauna Protection and Enhancements: Based on the finding of existing or future property assessments, monitoring reports, and other research efforts undertaken, protection and enhancement efforts consistent with this Management Plan may be undertaken to improve the ecological and biological diversity and health of the property.

VII. AMENDMENT/UPDATE

This Management Plan may be amended from time to time as necessary due to significant changes in use patterns and/or changes in land use policies on adjacent public lands, provided the Plan continues to protect the original intent of the preservation. Any proposed Plan amendment or update will be undertaken in consultation with the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, other pertinent Departments and Boards, La Plata Open Space Conservancy and La Plata County.

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Primary Trail System and Access Points



Horse Gulch Preservation: 1997 – 2012

