

ONE DAY IN
DENVER'S ^{NEW}
MOUNTAIN
PARKS

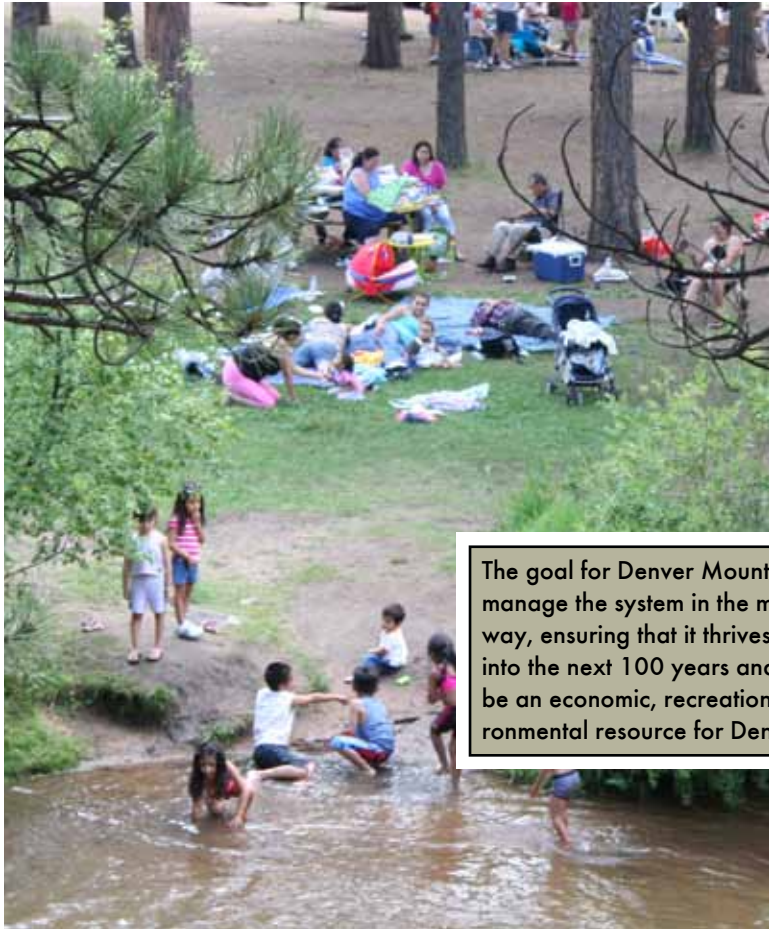
CHAPTER 3 MANAGEMENT
RECOMMENDATIONS





Summit Lake Park

CHAPTER 3 MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS



The goal for Denver Mountain Parks is to manage the system in the most sustainable way, ensuring that it thrives and survives into the next 100 years and continues to be an economic, recreational, and environmental resource for Denver residents.

O'Fallon Park

“We should maintain Denver’s interest in mountain lands and Colorado’s natural beauty.”

—Focus group participant 2008

3.A. FUNDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Like any public park or open space, the Denver Mountain Parks system generates quantifiable economic benefits to Denver and the region. It also generates tangible and intangible benefits increasing the quality of life for Denver residents and the nationwide appeal of the city itself. Parks also have a cost to the public and this chapter focuses on those costs and on a quilt of funding, partnership, and organizational strategies that meet the contemporary context for DMP.

The Need

The Mountain Park system has many similarities to Denver’s urban park system that impact the integrity of the physical infrastructure in the parks: significant, historical structures in need of improvement; an extensive internal park road system; degraded landscapes and social trails; noxious weeds; few visitor and ranger services; large public events; and the demands of heavy use. The system has some decidedly unique demands and attractions as well. The two bison herds, one at Daniels Park and the other at Genesee Mountain, require on-site caretaking and herd management. In three counties, Mountain Park employees cover 40 to 75 miles/day doing trash removal from the crowded Mountain Parks during the summer. Natural resource protection issues, like timber thinning, fire management, and wildlife management, are critical.

Capital Needs

The funding needs are great. More than fifty years of deferred maintenance and a small share of the department’s operating budget have resulted in the slow and obvious decay of the physical system. Parks are riddled with social trails; some rustic restrooms are more than 70 years old; picnic tables and park signs are in poor shape; and many picnic areas are compacted and degraded with overuse. The historic structures lack fire suppressant systems and accessible restrooms, and have decaying timber walls.

The yearly average of \$200,000 in capital funding for DMP only begins to cover these essential needs. Consequently, the Six-Year Capital Needs Assessment updated every year for Mountain Parks traditionally is 98% health and safety improvements only, and rarely includes new features or significant upgrades. More than \$10 million alone in structural and safety architectural needs for the major Mountain Parks facilities were identified in the 2001 DMP District-wide Needs Assessment, which was partially funded by the Colorado Historical Society's State Historical Fund.

This Master Plan recommends system-wide and individual park infrastructure repairs and improvements needed in addition to the \$12 million in facility needs already identified. The priorities are the most pressing basic repairs to the existing system, such as repair of roads, trails, amenities, natural resource restoration and protection. An important upgrade needed throughout the system is increasing the accessibility for the more than 55 million Americans defined today as a "person with a disability" and for an aging population. *The cost estimate for the basic restoration of natural resources and repair of existing built facilities is a minimum of \$23 million. Approximately \$8 million of that is for natural resource restoration.*

After repair and restoration is the addition of basic improvements, such as new trails, signage, or smaller park amenities, costing a minimum of \$6 million. These improvements bring DMP up to par with neighboring open space parks. In the third tier of recommendations are the major renovations and new facilities—the visionary pieces for the future—that need more study before cost estimates can even be completed.

With major improvements, the historic lodges, such as Echo Lake and Pahaska Tepee, have the potential to draw dramatically more heritage tourists, those visitors interested in the unique historic and natural resources. Heritage tourists expect a quality of facility and level of service similar to the National Park Service's Visitor Centers. A new Buffalo Bill Museum and restored Pahaska Tepee could attract thousands of international visitors.



Pahaska Tepee in Lookout Mountain Park

The Plan calls for more discussion and feasibility research for major future changes. It is difficult to put a price tag on the future, but some of the potential projects include:

- ▶ restoration and adaptive use of the Morrison CCC Camp for public use and possible new revenues,
- ▶ life-long learning camp built at Newton Park, including overnight facilities and new ropes course,
- ▶ more visitor services at Genesee Park,
- ▶ new museum for Buffalo Bill and restoration of Pahaska Tepee and the gravesite,
- ▶ building a new Balarat Outdoor School for DPS on Mountain Parks,
- ▶ conservation easements,
- ▶ acquisition of inholdings in Cub Creek Park,
- ▶ new youth and family programs throughout the parks, and
- ▶ new family campground and campground programs.

Operating Needs

Denver Mountain Parks has a full time staff of ten employees (one of whom is the ranger) with three or four additional seasonal employees each summer. Their responsibilities cover maintenance of some of the busiest mountain parks in the state spread across three counties; care of two bison herds and an elk herd; natural resource protection such as mountain pine beetle management, noxious weed control; and visitor assistance. Other Parks and Recreation staff provide oversight and services for planning, construction, and finances.



Park Ranger

The Mountain Parks superintendent traditionally has sought to leverage this short staffing through grants and partnerships. For example, each summer DMP has successfully competed for Americorps National Civilian Community Corps. These crews work at no cost to the City. In addition, cooperative management agreements with Jefferson County and Douglas County for fire and safety needs and some maintenance have increased efficiencies for everyone. Even so, the staff is stretched, and Denver Mountain Parks have a level of wear and tear not evident in other county open space parks.

The DMP operating budget (excluding Buffalo Bill Museum) translates into approximately \$71 an acre, which is between 25% and 35% of the average budget that Jefferson County, Douglas County, Boulder County, and the City of Boulder have for their comparable mountain and foothills parks. In addition to ongoing management and maintenance, the most obvious difference between Denver and other open space systems is what Denver does not provide. Only one ranger covers the extensive system and spends many summer Sunday mornings managing traffic congestion at O'Fallon Park along Bear Creek. ***DMP currently has no educators, no volunteer program, no marketing, no interpretation, no map makers, and in fact, no printed maps. See the box on page 43 for a comparison of system funding.***

Funding History and Context

Mountain Park funding issues are both political and economic, and can be contentious. They also have regional influences and regional impacts. Consequently, it's helpful to outline the history of funding for Denver Mountain Parks, its current funding level within the City, and the growing importance of regional partnerships.

With 14,000 acres, Mountain Parks represents 70% of Denver Park and Recreation's total 20,000-acre system. In contrast, its 2007 operating budget represented 1% of the department's overall operating budget of \$70,652,000 and 3% of the department's \$11,000,000 capital improvement budget. DMP are funded at \$71/acre; urban parks at \$5,000/acre. Even with the obvious differences between the infrastructure of mountain parks and of urban parks, DMP consistently has not been receiving an equitable and needed portion of the department and city's budget.

Until fifty years ago, Denver Mountain Parks were seen as a citywide asset that warranted a dedicated funding stream. With a substantial majority, Denver voters approved a Charter Amendment in 1912, enabling Denver City Council to establish a one-half mill levy dedicated to the acquisition, development, and maintenance of the Mountain Park system. For the average homeowner, with a \$3,000 home, that translated to \$0.50 a year.

PARKS INVENTORY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ 2 bison herds (24 animals each)
- ▶ 9 historic stone picnic shelters
- ▶ 4 large group picnic shelters
- ▶ 5 informal baseball fields
- ▶ 1 Challenge ropes course
- ▶ 4 historic buildings run by concessionaires
- ▶ 1 Jacques Benedict stone lodge managed by DPR
- ▶ 20 miles of hiking trails
- ▶ 20 additional miles of multi-use trails
- ▶ 12 miles of fencing
- ▶ 21 miles of park roads
- ▶ 3 montane and alpine lakes
- ▶ Buffalo Bill Museum & Grave
- ▶ Red Rocks Amphitheatre
- ▶ 3 historic CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp sites, with one remaining intact



View of Denver from Genesee Mountain



Newton Park

“Neighbors and long-time partners, the relationship of Denver and Jefferson County has matured into mutual respect and cooperation. We are ready to lend appropriate assistance....to advance the vision set forth in your master plan.”

—Letter to Mayor Hickenlooper from the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, October 21, 2008

For 44 years Mountain Parks had the dedicated funding mechanism. Then, in 1956, City Council retired that mill levy at a time when city staff and elected officials were moving towards more professional city governance and more control of city affairs. Funding for Mountain Parks began competing (poorly) with neighborhood projects and a budget set by a City Council naturally most receptive to their local district priorities. Funding and conditions in the Mountain Parks began their slide downward. The political context remains much the same now, 52 years later, with the City's preference against dedicated funds and for control to appropriate General and Capital Funds with flexibility.

Regional Contributions. Partnerships and regional cooperation, too, always have been core to the DMP. To leverage its mountain park funds, just as in the early years of the mountain park development, Denver continues to work closely with the State, other Counties, and agencies in joint ventures, efforts at management efficiencies, and funding. Both the State and Jefferson County, for example, not only substantially helped to fund the initial roads, but continue to maintain the State and County highways that pass through several of the parks. Douglas County and Denver recently announced a partnership in which Douglas County will invest approximately six million dollars in Daniels Park road and trail improvements. Through intergovernmental agreements, the Colorado State Forest Service provides professional forest management services, and Jefferson County Open Space built and now maintains approximately twenty miles of regional trails on Mountain Park property.

That legacy of cooperation, dependent upon ongoing mutually respectful relationships, is even more critical today as public funding tightens and some Mountain Parks grow more locally important as communities surround them. New neighbors and partners are working with Denver. The residents of Evergreen today tax themselves for an Evergreen Park and Recreation District (EPRD). Among other



Early brochure



Ropes course at Genesee Park

projects, the EPRD funded and manages the popular Evergreen Lake House Center and boardwalk located in Denver's Dedisse Park, which are used by Denver, as well as local, residents. Denver, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, receives 19% of the fees charged to access the recreational resources on Mt. Evans. Those funds are dedicated to improve daily maintenance and operations, and for capital improvements at Summit Lake Park.

EXAMPLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL PARK'S INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Type of Work: Bell Park	Unit	Quantity	Unit Cost	1. Protection of Natural Resources	2. Basic Infrastructure Repairs	3. New, park improvements
MP/Natural Resource Plan	EA	1		\$30,000.00		
Forest Thinning	LS	1	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00		
Revegetation	SF	321,750	\$1.50	\$482,625.00		
Site Improvements	SF	71,500	\$4.00		\$100,000.00	\$186,000.00
Road/parking Improvements	LF	6,500	\$60.00			\$390,000.00
New trail	LF	7,000	\$5,000.00			\$35,000.00
Trailhead Kiosk	EA	1	\$5,000.00			\$5,000.00
Sub Totals				\$562,625.00	\$100,000.00	\$616,000.00

An important new partner is the Denver Mountain Parks Foundation, founded by civic leaders in 2004. Their initial project, for example, was to help fund this Master Plan and launch a website with Denver Mountain Parks historic information.

Revenues from DMP. The icons in the DMP system also generate significant revenues directly to the City. For decades two of Denver's Mountain Parks have been among the top ten tourist attractions in the metropolitan area: Red Rocks Amphitheatre and Park and Buffalo Bill's Grave and Museum on Lookout Mountain. Winter Park Ski Area in Grand County attracts visitors from across the country year-round.

In the 1950s with the creation of the Division of Theatres and Arenas (T&A), management of Red Rocks Amphitheatre switched from Parks and Recreation to this new department. Although T&A has directly contributed to some improvement projects at Red Rocks over the years, all concert revenues are dedicated to T&A. Those revenues, in fact, help to subsidize other facilities, such as Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Clearly Red Rocks Amphitheatre could be an additional source of revenue for Denver Mountain Parks, but until other parts of the T&A system are more self-sustaining, contributions to the

DMP cannot be provided at the loss of any revenues to T&A. Any new revenues for the DMP most likely would be from new entrepreneurial partnerships between the departments and new events or fees at Red Rocks that could be dedicated to the park system.

Buffalo Bill Museum charges a modest admission fee and all of its revenues, averaging \$125,000 a year, go to the General Fund. It receives, in turn, around \$300,000 a year in operating funds. For decades concessionaires have provided services at Echo Lake Lodge on Mt. Evans during the summer, year-round at the Pahaska Tepee next to Buffalo Bill's grave, and at Chief Hosa Lodge and Campground. Echo Lake Lodge, for example, generated \$37,000 for Denver in 2007. These revenues have gone directly into Denver's General Fund. Today a portion of Pahaska Tepee revenues go into the dedicated Lookout Mountain Fund, averaging \$65,000/year, and can be used for capital or operating needs for the Buffalo Bill Museum and Gravesite. As of 2009, revenues from Chief Hosa Lodge and Campground go into a city-wide park facility special revenue fund which is shared by other park facilities, but can be used directly for Chief Hosa improvements. Yearly bison sales enable the bison herds to be close to self-sustaining, and modest revenues—\$8,000 in 2007—are generated by picnic site permits.

Denver purchased and opened the Winter Park Ski Resort in 1939-1940. In 2003, Denver began a long-term lease agreement (until 2078) with IntraWest Corporation guaranteeing the DPR department \$2.2 million/year for capital needs. The formula for that revenue changes to a guaranteed 3% of the gross proceeds over \$33 million in 2012, which is anticipated to exceed current revenue. Those funds are for the overall Parks and Recreation capital needs and are not earmarked back to Mountain Parks.

Current Situation. After five decades without dedicated funding or a commensurate share of the department’s capital and operating budgets, the DMP have found themselves serving thousands more visitors with deteriorating facilities and services. Even the ongoing support from partners and other Counties can only supplement Denver’s basic responsibility and efforts. Also, the DMP generate both large and small amounts of revenue to Denver, but the only funds earmarked for Parks and Recreation are the Winter Park CIP funds and the only funds earmarked at all for DMP are the Lookout Mountain Special Revenues.

Finally, Parks and Recreation received over \$93 million in capital improvement funds from the 2007 Better Denver Infrastructure Bond issue. A number of urban projects were cut from the initial list and the **entire Denver Mountain Park system was left out.** A parallel mill levy for capital projects also passed which can be used for DMP projects as well as urban ones. Disagreement about the management, funding, and future of the DMP contributed to the cut, and the decision was made to let this Master Plan research and address those core issues. Chapters 1 and 2 summarized the research for this Plan that answered those questions by revealing that:

- ▶ a strong level of use, interest, and value is held by Denver citizens for the DMP,
- ▶ Denver is one partner of many in a regional open space system and should bear its share of financial responsibility, and
- ▶ DMP are well-protected by City Charter and deed against sale or change in use. Mountain Parks are here to stay and a sustainable long-term plan is essential for their survival.

**COMPARISONS WITH THE CITY OF BOULDER
OPEN SPACE AND MOUNTAIN PARKS DEPARTMENT**

Boulder was selected for comparison because it is a city managing a mountain park system rather than a county-wide open space agency. Any comparison must be interpreted with some caution, as it is difficult to compare the indirect services and staffing reflected in each budget. That said, the City of Boulder has a 40,000-acre open space system with many similarities to Denver, with parcels located both inside the city and outside in the County, and even including land in Jefferson County. A separate Boulder County Open Space system is funded and managed by a different entity. Close to 40% of the City of Boulder’s open space is leased agricultural lands. Both Boulder’s and Boulder County’s open space systems are funded by citizen ballot initiatives that ensure dedicated funding.

The City of Boulder’s 2007 Open Space and Mountain Parks budget was \$8.2 million. The program anticipates an increase from 70 to 90 full time staff by 2009. Staffing includes educators, rangers, volunteer managers, wildlife and natural resource scientists. In comparison, Denver Mountain Park’s \$800,000 operating budget covers its 10 full time employees and materials. No scientists, interpreters, additional rangers provide services in DMP. However, Parks and Recreation also dedicates, from a different budget, funding for 80% of a planner’s time and 20% of the Natural Resource Director’s time. Both Denver Mountain Parks and the City of Boulder’s Open Space Department receive financial, legal, and administrative support from the cities above their base budgets.



DPR Outdoor Recreation at Echo Lake Park

“You learn everything from your kids. I’ve lived in Denver my whole life but didn’t know about the Mountain Parks until my son visited Genesee Park with his third grade class. Now we go all the time.”

—Michelle Madrid-Montoya

“What’s Next for Mountain Parks? While no one is disputing the beauty of the land or the benefit of having it in public ownership, it’s an appropriate time for a public discussion about park use, how to pay for management of the land, and even who should own each of the parcels.”

*Denver Post Editorial
8/24/07*

3.A. FUNDING QUILT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The Denver Mountain Parks may campaign for a larger share of the City pot, but the pot itself is shrinking. Decreases in Denver sales tax revenues and the overall city budget, combined with an economic slump nationwide, are forcing cuts rather than expansions. Therefore, patience, innovation, and a variety or quilt of options is necessary.

The Master Plan Funding Roundtable, comprised of Advisory Group members and outside experts such as the Trust for Public Lands, worked to evaluate funding opportunities for the Mountain Park system from both internal (City) and external (partnerships, entrepreneurial, regional) sources.

To lay a base for economic sustainability for the DMP, the following guiding principles and specific long- and short-term strategies are proposed. They reinforce the principles and direction of other City plans, such as the DPR Game Plan, the Denver Comprehensive Plan, and Greenprint Denver Plan and are based upon these documented findings:

- ▶ A strong public willingness exists today based on values held by Denver citizens to fund and protect the Mountain Parks, natural open space, and the environment. The land, forests, watersheds, and other natural resources protected in the DMP constitute an early and visionary expression of **Greenprint Denver’s** comprehensive sustainability goals.
- ▶ Inadequate funding is short-sighted. Urban and mountain parks have always been an economic draw for Denver and the region. The DMP’s ability to generate revenue, whether through tourism, concessions, or entertainment, depends upon a high quality resource and experience.
- ▶ Both short- and long-term strategies are needed.



Dilapidated picnic table at Bergen Park

Short-Term: The Funding Quilt

In the short term, a creative funding and organizational quilt needs to be put in place to stop degradation of the historic, cultural, and natural resources, improve visitor experience, and generate more revenue. These immediate strategies and recommendations, described in detail below, are composed of a mix of:

- ▶ **A Bigger Share of City Resources**
- ▶ **Building Capacity within the City and Denver Mountain Parks Foundation**
- ▶ **Partnerships**
- ▶ **New Opportunities**

Short-Term 1. A Bigger Share of Existing City Resources.

Goal: Allocate a more equitable and sustainable portion of capital and operating funds for the Mountain Parks. For the Master Plan,

The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) evaluated a number of existing funding sources within the City, which were discussed and analyzed by the Master Plan Advisory Group. The Seat Tax, for example, is not available until 2024 for other capital purposes. The existing lodging tax funds, already heavily spoken for the City’s Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau, marketing, and debt service on special revenue bonds are even decreasing.

Although parks within the DMP system generate between \$8 and \$9 million a year to Denver, the DMP function with a little over \$1 million a year in operating and capital for the system. TPL and the Advisory Group strongly recommend substantially more City operating and capital funds budgeted for the Mountain Parks each year. In terms of capital funds, that can include a greater share of the Winter Park funds, the Conservation Trust Funds, the new mill levy, or the general Capital Improvement Fund. Although in most ways it doesn’t matter which fund is used since they are all pooled together, the \$2.2 million/year Winter Park funds symbolically are important because they come from the Mountain Parks system. Because the passage of the 2007 Bond earmarked \$93 million for DPR, easing the capital funding demand for the urban park system, the Master Plan calls for a substantially larger share of the yearly capital budget to be devoted to the Mountain Parks.

Existing Resources Recommendations

- A. Denver Mountain Parks should receive a minimum of \$1 million a year in capital funds.
- B. Any increases in revenues from Winter Park that result from a change in the Winter Park lease formula in 2011 should be dedicated to the DMP.
- C. DMP should increase its share of operating funds each year to provide improved visitor services (such as rangers or maps) and ability to maintain and restore the natural resources and facilities.

Short-Term 2. Building capacity within the City and the Denver Mountain Parks Foundation (DMPF).

Goal: Provide the City and the Foundation with additional resources to help each increase its ability to implement the Master Plan.

The Denver Mountain Parks Foundation (DMPF) was founded in 2004 with the Mayor's positive support and a mission "to restore the historical integrity, relevance, quality and appreciation for Denver's Mountain Parks system; to advocate for it and ensure its future as a recreational, educational and open space resource for the city of Denver: its citizens, neighbors, and visitors." One of its first actions was to fund the market research necessary for the Master Plan. The potential effectiveness of a nonprofit, non-city partner for Denver Mountain Parks cannot be underestimated. It can work as an advocate for the system as well as provide a private arm that can raise money through merchandising, special programs, gift campaigns, and corporate partnerships.

As a young foundation, the DMPF will be building Board capacity, abilities, and priorities for their role in the DMP. Parks and Recreation needs to support the DMPF as it does the other Denver park conservancies and foundations. Within the City and department, the Mountain Parks also need greater visibility and a voice. It's a unique part of the park system, with its specialized land management and needs for regional partnership, fund-raising, and marketing.

Capacity Building Recommendations

- A. The Foundation and City should revise and expand their existing Memorandum of Understanding to define and clarify future roles for both in terms of implementing the Master Plan, fund-raising, merchandising, and advocacy.
- B. DPR needs to support the Foundation's efforts to build its organizational and fund-raising capacity.
- C. DPR should create a specific Division within Parks for DMP that gives it greater visibility and outside fund-raising abilities, and acknowledges its uniqueness and complexity.

"SHOULD DENVER SELL ITS MOUNTAIN PARKS?"

This has been asked by elected officials and newspaper editors off and on since 1956 when the mill levy for the Mountain Parks disappeared. This Master Plan unequivocally argues that Denver should not divest itself of such an invaluable asset even if it could.

Myth Busting:

Even if this plan called for "sale," that would be legally impossible for virtually all of the Mountain Parks. A major portion of the land was purchased from the U.S. Forest Service and would revert to it as a cashless transaction. Most parcels that were purchased or donated have deed restrictions or reverter clauses. Even without these hurdles, Denver residents would have to vote to approve any sale or lease because, like all designated parks, the DMP are protected by City Charter. See Deed Map in the Appendix.

Short-Term 3. Regional Partnerships.

Goal: Strengthen Denver's legacy of intergovernmental and agency partnerships, acknowledging the DMP's multiple roles today as Denver resource, regional resource, and community resource. As noted already, Denver has long worked closely with federal, State, County, and local governments to acquire, build, and maintain Denver's Mountain Parks since their inception. Funding, natural resource and wildlife management, new amenities, fire and safety, trail planning, and construction are just a few of the ongoing cooperative ventures. Newer partnerships, such as one with the nonprofit Lariat Loop Heritage Alliance, have increased marketing and visibility for the Mountain Parks. What has changed over the last few decades, heightening the need today for increased cooperation, is the incredible growth of surrounding communities. Some of Denver's Mountain Parks now play dual roles, both as regional open space attractions and as local, community parks.



O'Fallon Park entrance on busy summer weekend

Evergreen, for example, had a population of 500 permanent (and 5,000 summer) residents in 1925 when people were picnicking at Bergen Park, built at the crossroads of three dusty roads. Today, the Evergreen area and the Evergreen Park and Recreation District (EPRD) boast 41,000 residents. Within EPRD are 4,700 acres of Denver parks, 3,200 acres of Jefferson County Open Space parks, and 80 acres of EPRD parks. When EPRD recently purchased property and completed a Master Plan for their signature park, Buchanan Park, the planning encompassed ideas for the adjacent Bergen Park. A new internal trail, funded by EPRD, will connect the parks.

Parkland, of course, also generates direct and indirect benefits to the communities in which it is located. Parkland and, in particular, open space lands, increase property values not only adjacent to the park but the vicinity. Some modest sales taxes from Pahaska Tepee and Red Rocks events go to the Jefferson County. The individual interviews done for the Master Plan indicated that many residents living near Denver Mountain Parks appreciate the role that these parks play in their daily lives and in their property values and would consider helping to support the parks.

Partnership Recommendations

- A. Build on the history of partnership with Evergreen area residents to create a more mutually beneficial relationship, including possible community volunteer programs, cooperative maintenance, joint programming, and possible voter approved help with funding new Denver Mountain Park amenities.
- B. Commit City funds to implement Denver’s share of the Master Plan for Daniels Park, a result of the partnership recently legalized between Douglas County and the City and County of Denver.
- C. Aggressively pursue joint ventures and grant opportunities with all partners, including conservation easements sought in Clear Creek County or regional trail opportunities in Jefferson County.
- D. Commit City funds to significant joint projects, i.e., the Buffalo Herd Overlook, an initiative led by Lariat Loop Heritage Alliance, or construction of new parking and amenities with USDA Forest Service at Summit Lake to improve visitor experiences and protect resources.
- E. Explore options for local residents to support their “community” Denver Mountain Parks, either in-kind or financially.

Short-term 4. New Opportunities: Increased Programs, Partners, and Entrepreneurial Efforts.

Goal: Innovatively increase revenues and meet contemporary recreation and tourism needs, while honoring the integrity of the historic mountain park system. Denver Mountain Parks has the potential of garnering and increasing revenues from many of its sites. The system already includes two of the top ten tourist attractions in the area (Red Rocks and Buffalo Bill), a ski resort, concessionaires, a campground, and permitted historic structures. Parts of the system already are designed and managed to raise City revenues. With shrinking City budgets and aging infrastructure, cities across the country are

searching harder for even more avenues in which to provide public recreation opportunities while increasing revenues.

Public sentiment and definitions regarding potential commercialization of public parks and open spaces can vary widely and are strongly felt. Consequently, the Master Plan team proposed the following five overall strategies and context for entrepreneurship, which were endorsed by the majority of the Advisory Group members.

First, the DMP system should be allowed to develop any new ventures, such as events, corporate partnerships, programs, naming, and merchandising, that protect the natural and historic resource base and meet all City policies. Second, a priority is increased fees, programs, or opportunities from Red Rocks or Winter Park directed specifically to the Denver Mountain Parks. Third, reinvestment in the resource base is key. Facilities must be of the highest quality, highest character, and authenticity to attract more visitors and increase revenues. This is especially important for historic attractions such as Buffalo Bill, Echo Lake Lodge, or Chief Hosa Lodge. Fourth, staff must be dedicated to work closely with Theatres and Arenas, the Denver Mountain Parks Foundation, and other partners in any efforts to increase revenues. Finally, a new emphasis on marketing and partnerships will be necessary for the success of these efforts.

New Opportunities Recommendations

- A. Research and implement potential new revenues from Red Rocks, such as an increase in Facility Use Fees from Red Rocks events, or new events that can generate funds for the DMP and from Winter Park, such as a ski lift ticket donation.
- B. Create a strategy and partnership packet, with DMPE, for corporate partnerships. Actively search for funds to increase youth visits to the DMP Parks and produce interpretive materials.
- C. Create and implement a marketing plan.
- D. Assess the few DMP parcels that may no longer maintain their original integrity, context, or serve their original purpose

WILLING TO PAY?

“Would you be willing to pay for the use of mountain parks, trails, and open space? (2006 Marketing Support surveys)”

Residence	Yes	For some	No
Denver	38%	28%	28%
Jefferson	35%	30%	28%
Douglas	36%	34%	23%

(e. g. Strain Gulch, Starbuck, Forsberg) and consider legal options for them including new uses, sale, lease or partnership (if not restricted by deed or Charter).

- E. Complete a Master Plan for Buffalo Bill and Lookout Mountain that includes a new governance model for the museum.
- F. Research new concessionaire options.
- G. Expand the existing vigorous program of applying for grants and other outside funding.
- H. Continue building innovative public/private partnerships, such as with the Lariat Loop Heritage Alliance.

Long-term: Dedicated Funding

Following patterns across the country and in Colorado of dedicated funding for regional open space, future sustainability for Denver Mountain Parks may require a **locally or regionally dedicated funding stream**. The City and County of Denver is one of only two counties in the Front Range that does not have a dedicated funding source for the acquisition, care of, and amenities for natural open space.

As of 2007, Colorado had 160 successful parks and open space funding tax initiatives. As noted above, the dedicated funding for Denver Mountain Parks was stopped in the mid-1950s and political sentiment in Denver remains cautious and competitive in terms of any ballot issues or dedicated funding.

Nevertheless, the experts in open space funding for this Master Plan, the nonprofit The Trust for Public Lands (TPL), as well as many of the Master Plan Advisory Group civic leaders, agreed that some sort of dedicated funding in the future would ensure the viability of the Mountain Parks. It would also bring Denver more fully into the regional open space partnership and strengthen natural resource management at a regional scale.

ENTREPRENEURIAL BRAINSTORM	
▶	Rent bicycles and snow shoes
▶	Increase parking fees at Red Rocks and earmark difference for DMP
▶	Develop new visitor amenity, such as the funicular
▶	Let Winter Park yearly ski pass purchasers add \$1 for Denver Mountain Parks
▶	Create and sell Denver Mountain Parks dinnerware, t-shirts, posters, and postcards

Regional Funding Mechanisms

Any regional mechanism will take time and collaboration to research and to implement. Several models exist with some similarities to the Colorado Front Range situation. Most regional open space and park systems are at a county scale in large counties, such as Los Angeles County, Pima County in Arizona, King County in Washington, or the Colorado examples such as Douglas County.

In the Los Angeles area, the public beaches, for example, are funded and managed by a mix of county/regional funding and municipalities. A county-wide Los Angeles Mountain Recreation and Conservation Authority, working with individual cities, has issued a number of general obligation bonds to improve the regional beaches and parks.

For the Colorado Front Range, access and management may be more key than distance. DMP are not within the City and County of Denver, but the distance that Denver residents travel to reach the Mountain Parks is similar if not shorter than larger park systems, such

as Phoenix with its desert parks. For Denver, Jefferson, Douglas, Clear Creek, and Boulder Counties, the reality is that the visitorship is far beyond the residency of these counties alone; visitors come from the seven major Front Range counties, and a regional approach may extend to eastern counties as well. **Any future dedicated funding source for Denver Mountain Parks will require a concerted effort over time to build the argument and the coalitions necessary.**

Scenarios for future dedicated funding include:

- ▶ initiatives that extend existing multi-county funding streams (such as the stadium sales tax) but earmark them for regional open space;
- ▶ initiatives that distinguish Denver’s overall park and open space system and earmark dedicated funding toward the whole system (as in cities such as Minneapolis);
- ▶ initiatives that earmark City funds for regional components of Denver Parks and Recreation, such as natural open space along the rivers in the city as well as the Mountain Parks;
- ▶ initiatives modeled on the regional Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), which began in 1989 and has been renewed twice at the ballot, dedicating a one-tenth of 1% sales tax to regional cultural and historical attractions. The SCFD, which geographically follows the RTD District, acknowledges that programs and places, from small ballet troupes to the regional icons such as the Denver Zoo, serve and benefit a regional audience. A regional open space district could be created with this model. Regional funding mechanisms could treat the regional natural resources—natural open space systems, water, and wildlife—in a similar way.

However, both the Master Plan Advisory Group and TPL believe that regional mechanisms are only in very early discussions and may face some opposition. Regional partners suggested that regional funding discussions are more likely when Denver demonstrates an increased and sustained commitment to its Mountain Park system. Until then, the regional voters and elected officials are more apt to support their own local initiatives.

Building a Long-term Funding Mechanism Recommendations

- A. Denver should increase its funding level and commitment to Denver Mountain Parks at a cost per acre level similar to that of other regional open space providers.
- B. Denver should continue to nurture existing, and build new, partnerships and communication avenues with other counties and recreation districts.
- C. Denver should continue, in collaboration with its neighboring jurisdictions, to research the feasibility of a regional funding mechanism.

CONCLUSION

Denver residents use and value their historic Denver Mountain Parks, as well as the parks provided by Douglas, Jefferson, and Clear Creek counties and special districts such as Evergreen Park & Recreation District. As a full partner in this regional open space system that serves hundreds of thousands of people, Denver needs to apply the **DPR Game Plan** values of equity, sound economics, engagement, and sustainability to the Denver Mountain Parks, beginning with a more appropriate share of existing resources.



Friends of Red Rocks volunteer clean-up day



Stapleton Braille Trail in Genesee Park

FOCUS GROUPS

What: Two diverse focus groups held in 2008 to test awareness of Denver Mountain Parks, importance to residents, and effectiveness of key marketing messages.

Surprise! When asked what they know about Denver Mountain Parks, people were clueless. Twelve out of thirteen people said they had never “heard of them.” But, when shown a map, everyone came alive. Stories of Red Rocks on a Saturday morning, fishing at Echo Lake, or just a hike. What was the group’s main recommendation? “Let people know they exist.”

Why did they use Mountain Parks? Like them? The two top reasons (out of 7) selected were for “quality of life” (primarily recreation) and “protection of natural resources.” “When I go to the mountains, it’s a mental shift.” “It speaks to Denver’s character to protect beauty and land.”

Did it matter to them that the parks were owned by Denver? For some, not at all. For most, though, they said that it was good and unique for a city, Denver, to care about the beauty of all Colorado and to have such vision for its citizens. “I think it’s excellent that Denver owns and operates mountain parks. It expands my perception of the park system.”

The group was excited to learn that all the Denver parks are protected by Charter and their vote. “It’s like a weird sense of entitlement... We all have this piece of something, but didn’t know it. It makes me proud.” “Wow, I have a say in what happens to these parks?”



New logo for Denver Mountain Parks, by artist Michael Schwab

3.B. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

No highway sign marks the entrance to Little Park near Idledale. When surveyed, a Denver resident says that he and his wife would visit Denver Mountain Parks if they only had any idea where they are.

The fourth generation of a southwest Denver family continues their yearly tradition of picnicking at O’Fallon Park on Father’s Day, but is surprised to learn that it is a Denver Mountain Park. Mountain Parks visitors looking for park maps to help them plan their visit are simply out of luck. With an operating budget that barely covers trash pick-up and with some Mountain Parks already bursting at their seams on a summer weekend, it’s not surprising that marketing and interpretive materials are nonexistent.

Yet marketing is essential and a critical first step for the Mountain Parks. Marketing and communication materials ensure that Denver knows what its constituents are seeking in terms of a Mountain Park experience and amenities, that Denver is providing and caring for what residents value, and that visitors have the information they need to make their experience enjoyable.

Marketing also is a key factor in building financial and political support. With a park system that was safeguarded from development almost 100 years ago, those parks and their protection can easily be taken for granted today.

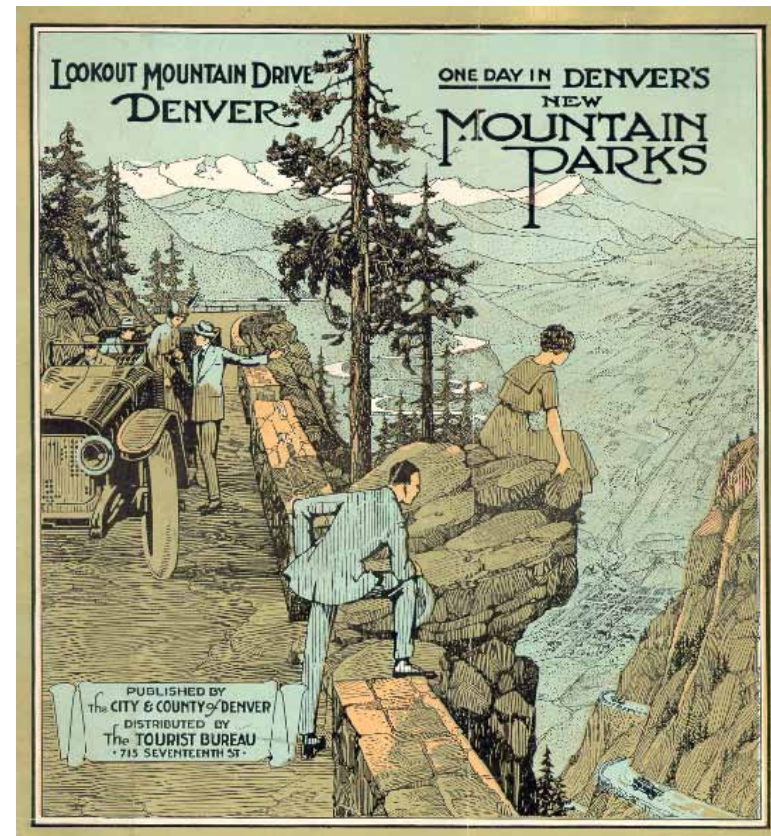
With a strong marketing presence, Denver residents can recognize and appreciate Denver’s foresight in safeguarding watersheds and natural resources and in providing accessible recreation to all. Marketing helps to provide the data that City decision-makers need in making budgetary decisions. Marketing builds pride of ownership as it reminds people of Denver’s early civic leadership.

Extensive public research between 2002 and 2007 of Denver residents, Denver Mountain Park visitors, and regional open space visitors all reaffirm the overwhelming need for marketing and communications materials. Among other things, the results revealed that:

- ▶ around 68% of Denver residents visit traditional DMP each year but also visit other open space systems, such as Jefferson County's, as frequently,
- ▶ Denver decision makers do not hear from their constituents about the Mountain Parks despite the fact that they regularly use them,
- ▶ Denver residents, as well as regional open space users, highly value the acquisition and protection of open space,
- ▶ many people are unaware where the Mountain Parks are located or what features they have,
- ▶ many visitors within the parks themselves often do not realize that they are in a Denver park,
- ▶ awareness of the Mountain Parks as a whole has dropped over many years,
- ▶ people may be aware of individual parks, such as Genesee or Echo Lake, but do not realize that they are part of a designed, cohesive system, and
- ▶ current marketing promotes a few individual sites but not the overall system.

Despite these challenges, as Chapter 2 detailed, both visitors and the general Denver public value the existence of public open space and Mountain Parks for recreational opportunities, as well as for natural resource protection.

A wide and well documented recognition of the value of the Mountain Parks will help the system to gain the advocacy and funding necessary for maintenance and improvements. It also enhances the visitors' experience, from the moment at home that they start "re-



Early tourist brochure inviting people to the Mountain Parks

searching" a trip, to the drive, and finally, to the experience within the park.

Consequently, the goal is for Denver to provide an ongoing marketing program, with supporting high quality communications and interpretive materials, to build a greater awareness of the Denver Mountain Parks and to improve the visitor's experience.

Marketing and Communications Plan

The sheer number of existing and potential audiences—Denver residents, Denver decision-makers, regional users, and tourists—makes marketing the Denver Mountain Parks complex.

A Marketing and Communications Plan and initial products were developed for the Master Plan by professional marketing consultants, analyzed and expanded by the Master Plan Advisory Group, and reviewed by two smaller Marketing Roundtable workshops that included Advisory Board members and outside experts.

The overall goal for the Marketing Plan was to “develop awareness of the Denver Mountain Parks system and its value to the Denver community to establish the civic support required to create community ownership and for adequate future operating and capital funding.” The specific objectives are to:

- ▶ create awareness of the Denver Mountain Parks system, and the value it brings to the city and residents of Denver as our mountain backyard.
- ▶ develop an awareness that the Mountain Parks system is owned by the city/residents and is a unique part of the Denver Parks and Recreation system.
- ▶ create awareness of the role that the Denver Mountain Parks system plays in the greater context of preserving regional undeveloped green space for quality of life, ecological protection, watershed value, and scenic backdrop.

The key Marketing and Communications recommendations

- A. Develop the organizational capacity to implement the Marketing and Communications Plan, such as adequate staffing, fund-raising, and creation of an ongoing Marketing Committee.
- B. Complete (and replicate on a systematic basis in the future) the market research needed to gain a current, in-depth understanding of Denver residents’ attitudes about the DMP through existing and new benchmark research.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Did you know that Denver owns 14,000 acres of mountain parks and trails...?”

40% yes
60% no

—2006-07 Marketing Support Survey

- C. Develop an identity for the Mountain Parks system: clear message, positioning, and visual identity.
- D. Implement effective and targeted communications to increase awareness among key audiences, such as media coverage, promotional programs and events. Initial audiences are Denver decision-makers and Denver constituents.
- E. Develop, with the Denver Mountain Parks Foundation and concessionaires, a high quality merchandising program as a source of revenue and community awareness.
- F. Design a system of effective interpretive and communications materials for Mountain Parks visitors and the public, such as signage, maps, brochures, programs, and other tools.
- G. Develop effective, ongoing communication with civic leaders about the value and opportunities within the Mountain Parks through materials, data, tours, meetings, and the active participation of the Foundation and Advisory Group.

3.C. GUIDELINES

Design Guidelines

Published separately, the Design Guidelines provide a framework to identify and detail the specific physical characteristics of the Mountain Park system that individually and collectively create the DMP design character. The structures, buildings and park settings of the DMP have a distinctive style and experience that provides a cohesive character and aesthetic for the whole system. That character is derived from the rustic naturalistic design of its earliest features, such as its stone shelters and buildings, connecting roads, and picnic sites. The Guidelines describe the high quality design and craftsmanship executed in the original features and outline methods for how to continue this tradition in the rehabilitation of parks and facilities and in new construction.

The purpose of the Design Guidelines is to provide guidance in the design and implementation of the repair and rehabilitation of existing features, buildings and sites, as well as new construction of park facilities. They are intended for Denver Parks and Recreation staff as well as for other agencies and organizations, consultants, and contractors involved in the design, repair, construction, and maintenance, or in the review of such for all of the Denver Mountain Parks' facilities and sites. If the Mountain Park system becomes designated as a Local Landmark, the Guidelines would be used to review major proposed changes to facilities.

Natural Resource Guidelines

Unlike the Design Guidelines, the Master Plan recommends individual park Natural Resource Plans be completed. Chapter 4 also includes specific strategies for each park or parcel.

