

Merit Award – Innovation/Creative Partnerships and Collaborations: Emerald Mountain Park Master Plan





The Emerald Mountain Park Master Plan

reflects the Steamboat Springs community's passion for the outdoors, focus on recreation, and appreciation for heritage and the environment. Each recommendation included in the plan was carefully measured against an overarching vision to nurture and care for what exists at Emerald Mountain Park today, for the preservation of its wilderness qualities, natural resources, and unique recreational experience.

The City of Steamboat Springs was very fortunate to be able to acquire the 586-acre Emerald Mountain Park parcel from Lyman Orton in 2011. Part of what made that possible was a conservation easement placed on the property many years prior, held by Yampa Valley Land Trust. That conservation easement made the purchase economically feasible and established the framework within which all future recreation development and management activities must take place on the property. The property had already been established as a world-class destination for mountain biking, and for more than half a century, a popular spot for locals to hike, ski, run and walk their dogs.

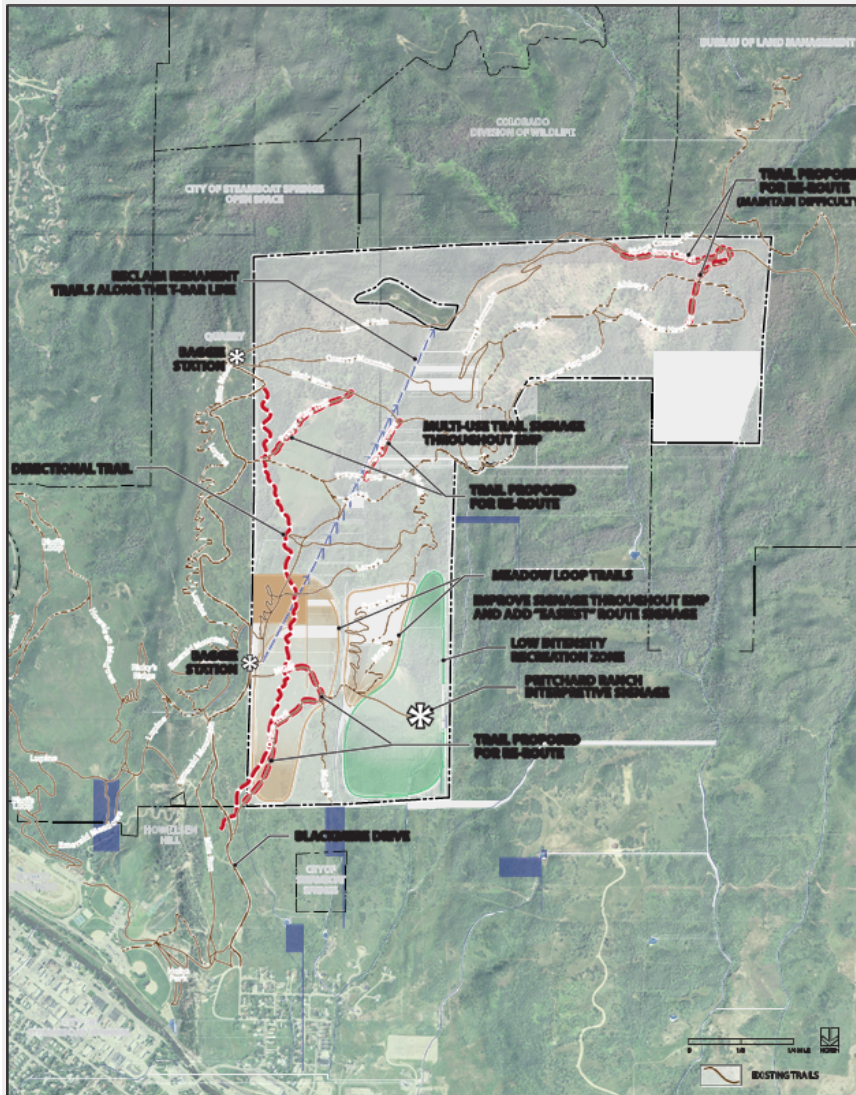
A unique feature of Emerald Mountain Park that resulted from the City's purchase agreement is that the maintenance and improvement of the park would rely substantially on the efforts of Howelsen Emerald Mountain Partnership (the Partnership), a non-profit organization, and through volunteers. The Partnership is responsible for maintenance, upkeep and certain other activities on the property, based on their agreement with the City and within the parameters of the Master Plan and the conservation easement on the property. As the Master Plan recommends, efforts will be optimized when they cross over stakeholder groups. What is best for a particular recreational activity or interest will maintain and elevate the park as a whole.

The Master Plan celebrates, as one resident described it, the "greatest city-owned park in the world," a theme that resonated throughout and set the bar high for this planning process.

Innovative: The opportunities that made this planning efforts possible were unique and entirely based on collaboration. The City was able to fund the planning consultant, SE Group, through a GOCO grant, as well as leverage that with an additional grant from the National Park Service River, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, effectively doubling the project budget. The SE Group/NPS team worked seamlessly with the City to

develop the Master Plan. NPS gave countless hours of planning and design support and funded the MindMixer application. By harnessing the collaborative team throughout the process, the result was a sum greater than its individual parts.

Transferable: The Master Plan is a case study in collaboration. While the planning techniques deployed were not cutting edge, the framework for collaboration amongst a diverse stakeholder group is something that can be replicated. Cooperative Planning that brings both public and private interests together in common purpose helped assure that all relevant issues were on the table from the beginning and the ultimate vision embraced them fully.



Quality/Excellence: An important part in the communication of Emerald Park Master Plan was documenting the extensive public engagement process. This helped to bolster the sense of inclusiveness within the plan and allowed for key stakeholders to act as “ambassadors” towards future implementation. Using graphics, images and a consistent thoughtful message, the resulting master plan document achieved a “guidebook” style; helping paint the vision and evoke the cause.

Promotes community progress: Emerald Mountain Park is highly unique and provides both parkland and open space for the benefit of the Steamboat Springs community. By removing the development rights from the property, the conservation easement allowed the City to purchase the property at a greatly reduced price in 2011. The purchase was partially made possible through a \$600,000 grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) to the Yampa River System Legacy Project. Emerald Mountain Partnership will be instrumental in the park’s future, as the plan is

implemented—a unique partnership that relieves the City of costly maintenance activities. The City ultimately oversees Emerald Mountain Park and the Master Plan is the guidebook for its future.

Public participation: The community also came to this process with many new ideas for Emerald Mountain Park. What made the Emerald Mountain Park Master Plan unique is the breadth of user groups and stakeholders that were involved in the planning process to craft a plan that nurtures and cares for the land. User and stakeholder groups that were involved in the process included: Routt County Riders, Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club, Bike Town USA, Yampatika, Rocky Mountain Youth Corp, the Historic Preservation Society, the Steamboat Springs Running Series, Routt County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Steamboat Nordic Council, and more. Through MindMixer, there were over 6,000 project page views, with over 600 unique visitors and 127 participants.

Ideas were carefully evaluated by the planning team for their consistency with the conservation easement and greater vision for the park. Enhanced biking, Nordic and hiking opportunities, environmental education and interpretation, and wildlife conservation areas are key outcomes of the public process. The Master Plan is a direct reflection of this breadth of input that was received during the public process.

Effective: As an overarching guidebook pointing the way towards greater public enjoyment of this invaluable community resource, the Emerald Mountain Park Master Plan has been effective. Like all policy-level documents, the work continues within the community to fine-tune and focus the vision towards implementation. That work has been made somewhat easier through the collaborative effort embodied in the Master Plan.



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