



HIGHLANDS RANCH COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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Backcountry Wilderness Area Conceptual Plan Question and Answer

Q: What is the Backcountry Wilderness Area?

The Backcountry Wilderness Area is 8,200 acres (approximately 13 square miles) of conservation area to the south of the homes in Highlands Ranch. It stretches from just east of Monarch Blvd to Highway 85 on the west side. It is private property, owned and managed by the Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA). It is one of the largest contiguous open spaces along the Front Range and is a jewel of conservation providing critical habitat for a wide variety of wildlife including: elk, deer, bear, mountain lion, coyote, eagles and other birds of prey.

Q: How did the Highlands Ranch Community Association obtain the Backcountry?

The land was initially set aside for conservation in the 80's. In the late 80's the Open Space Conservation Agreement determined that once Highlands Ranch was 90% developed the land, which is now known as the Backcountry, would be turned over to the HRCA. A partial conveyance of the land to the HRCA occurred in 2006 and the rest of the land was turned over in 2009.

Q: What do we use the Backcountry for right now?

The land is carefully managed for wildlife habitat and conservation; as well as a working cattle ranch. The northern part of the Backcountry (closest to the homes) has over 25 miles of natural surface trails for hiking, running, and mountain biking. 12 miles of the trails belong to the Douglas County East/West Regional Trail and the rest are private trails for HRCA members. The southern end, and majority of the Backcountry, is protected and only accessed through guided activities that the HRCA provides.

Since 2009 the HRCA has slowly and responsibly added more and more programs that occur in the Backcountry. Programs offered today include: Youth Outdoor Camps, Horseback rides, lessons, and camps, nature hikes, b-day parties, hay wagon rides, and much more. All of these programs occur without improved facilities. Gross revenue from these programs is projected to be near \$350,000 in 2017.

Q: How is the management of the Backcountry funded?

Homeowner assessments fund the Backcountry. Each homeowner pays \$142/quarter to the HRCA. Approximately \$340,000 or about \$11/household funds the Backcountry operations.

Q: If it's a conservation area then why do we want to "develop" it?

The Backcountry's zoning document, called the OSCA Plan, completed in 2002, set aside "planning areas" which are areas in the parts of the Backcountry closest to our homes where certain uses or "development" is allowed. The purpose of allowing the addition of certain amenities is to create revenue to help fund the operations of the entire Backcountry; perhaps lessening the burden on homeowners to fund the Backcountry operations through homeowner assessments. Also, the addition of certain amenities to the Backcountry could help to continue to set Highlands Ranch apart from other communities along the Front Range; as does its four recreation centers, vast network of parks and trails, community events, etc.

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Q: What is the Backcountry Planning Areas Advisory Committee (BPAAC)?

BPAAC is a Board committee that was formed after the 2012 Community Survey in which the community was asked what kinds of amenities, if any, they would like to see in the Backcountry. In 2015 BPAAC presented a recommendation to the Board of Directors as far as what amenities would fit best with community desires and current programs the Backcountry offers. The full report and power point presentation can be found here: <http://hrcaonline.org/About-Us/Recreation-Centers/Rules-Management> and is titled "BPAAC Recommendations to the HRCA Board of Directors Regarding Potential Uses of the Backcountry Planning Areas."

In Addition, the HRCA Delegates formed a separate study group in 2015. Their report is located on the same web page and is titled: "Delegate Backcountry Study Group Report to the Delegate Body." This Delegate report led to the creation of a new Bylaw that was adopted in 2016 that ensures the community and Delegates have final approval of any additions in the Backcountry.

Q: Is any of the Backcountry permanently protected?

Yes, most of it in fact. There is a Conservation Easement that protects approximately two thirds of the Backcountry.

Q: What is the purpose of this Conceptual Plan?

To gather information that will aid in future decisions of what, if any, amenities to add to the Planning Areas. Information gathered will include public opinion and desires, location of amenities, types of amenities, scale of amenities, necessary infrastructure, and estimated costs.

Q: What is the expected completion date for the Conceptual Plan?

The plan is expected to be complete in the first quarter of 2017.

Q: Is there a plan to build something next year, after this Conceptual Plan is complete?

No. Additional steps are necessary before any kind of construction can begin. This is a conceptual plan and will not include detailed drawings, architectural drawings, construction plans, etc. Detailed plans would be the next step; but before that would occur, there must be approval of additional expenditures through the budget approval process and also approval from the Delegates before any kind of construction could begin (see the next question).

Q: What assurances does the Community have that there will be public input on amenities that are added to the Backcountry, before any kind of construction could start?

The HRCA Delegates amended the Bylaws in 2016 to add a new Article 13: "Community Involvement Process For Backcountry Development Proposals."

This new Bylaw requires any large development proposal to go through a lengthy community approval process that includes Delegate approval, a community hearing, and final Delegate approval.

Q: Who can I talk to for more information about the Conceptual Plan and the Backcountry?

Backcountry Wilderness Area Director: Mark Giebel; 303-471-8885 or mark.giebel@hrcaonline.org

Q: How do I participate in the development of the Conceptual Plan?

There will be four community open houses hosted by Mundus/Bishop, the firm that is completing the conceptual plan, the first one is August 30th and last one is January 24th. The meeting schedule can be found here:

<http://hrcaonline.org/About-Us/Recreation-Centers/Rules-Management>

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Q: Where can I find more information about the Backcountry, its management documents, maps, past reports, surveys, etc.?

All of the Backcountry management documents can be found on this web page:

<http://hrcaonline.org/About-Us/Recreation-Centers/Rules-Management>



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