

Narrative

INTRODUCTION

The Backcountry Wilderness Area of Highlands Ranch (BWA), also known as the Open Space Conservation Area (OSCA), is an 8,200 acre property in northwest Douglas County currently owned and managed by the Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA). The uses and development standards are outlined in Section XIII – Nonurban Area of the Highlands Ranch Planned Development (HRPD) Guide.

In 1988, the Douglas County Board of County Commissioners approved a Rezoning of Highlands Ranch that created OSCA. The HRCA Board of Directors approved the OSCA Plan first in 1993, with revisions in 1996 and 2000. The OSCA Plan is part of the HRPD and serves as the framework for the development of OSCA.

The overall Nonurban Area is divided into three large subareas: *Nonurban Area Exclusive of OSCA, Active Recreation and Public Facility, Cultural and Educational, and Playfield Portions of OSCA*, identified as OSCA Planning Areas A through J (Planning Areas) which total about 1,200 acres, and *The Open Space Portion of the OSCA*, which are the wildlife habitat, open space, and passive use areas and encompass approximately 7,000 acres. These three areas of the HRPD provide for different intensity of uses as outlined in the OSCA Plan and HRPD.

Public and Commercial uses within the Planning Areas were to be allowed, such as schools, governmental offices, fire and police stations, libraries, commercial recreation such as theaters, bowling alleys, and recreation centers. All with structures up to 50,000 square feet as a Use by Right, and beyond 50,000 square feet as a Use by Special Review.

As stated in the OSCA Plan, the intent of the OSCA Plan was to act as a guide for future development in OSCA (Backcountry Wilderness Area). The Plan was prepared starting with an environmental analysis of the property to allow the land to “tell us” how it would best be used. The identification and mapping of environmental conditions differentiated areas suitable for categories of use. One of the main goals of the OSCA Plan was for wildlife considerations to play a major role in the decisions made on how this property would be used.

As a result, the Planning Areas that allow development were in areas that exhibited the following conditions: favorable soil types, slopes less than 15%, areas with no rock fall hazards, areas located outside of flood plains, and areas outside of the most sensitive wildlife habitat areas.

The OSCA Plan was mostly written in the 1990s with a final revision in 2000. It is an understatement to say that things have changed in Highlands Ranch in the past 30 years. The evolution of Highlands Ranch, and the evolution of the BWA, now warrant consideration of another revision to the OSCA Plan and the HRPD. The OSCA Plan was written to ensure that as times and conditions changed, that it would be adaptable.

The Vision Statement in the OSCA Plan concludes with stating, “No plan is forever. Both our natural resources and our society are dynamic and subject to change and our planning process reflects this. When conditions and problems change enough, new planning with public participation will begin.”

In the spirit of the OSCA Plan, the HRCA is proposing to amend the Highlands Ranch Planned Development. The proposal is to remove 65 acres of developable land within Planning Area E, as depicted on the HRPD, and create two new Planning Areas within the Backcountry, K and L, that total 65 acres (Exhibit A).

As proposed, the new Planning Areas will have similar, but more restrictive and less intense Uses Permitted by Right as Planning Areas B, D, E, and F. The proposed Planning Areas K and L are currently within the *7,000 acre Open Space Portion of OSCA*. Proposed Planning Area L is also on the far edge of a zone known as the Historical and Cultural Overlay Zone, which has certain developmental standards, all of which the proposed uses can comply with.

This narrative will demonstrate the proposed Planning Areas K and L are as, or more, suitable for development than the existing Planning Areas when considering location, soils, ease of access, development ease (access to utilities), impact to existing communities, and most importantly, impact to wildlife and habitat.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BACKCOUNTRY WILDERNESS AREA SINCE 2010

The Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) became owners of the Backcountry Wilderness Area (BWA) in late 2009. The first trails in the BWA opened in 2006, with additional trails added in 2009 and 2014. The Douglas County East/West trail was built in segments through the BWA during that same time span. Today, there are 25 miles of natural surface trails throughout the BWA. The trails are strategically placed near the developed areas of Highlands Ranch to minimize impact to the conservation of wildlife and their habitat, and to provide easy access to Highlands Ranch.

We began offering various types of education and recreation programs and opportunities for the public to enjoy the BWA in 2010. There were horseback trail rides in the Wildcat Mountain area, east of Monarch Boulevard, from 2010-2015 and we offered various hikes and nature programs to all ages. All our programs and educational opportunities are fee based and open to the public, not just Highlands Ranch residents, and that continues today.

We started offering licensed day camps in 2012. Early on, our camps were limited to a half day because of a lack of available shelter/building in the event of a thunderstorm. Parents dropped off their children at various trailheads around the BWA, each day with a different drop off site.

From 2010 to 2015 most of our programs took place in the Wildcat Mountain Area. Identified in the 2002 Management Plan, the Wildcat Mountain Area was thought to be the best location for educational activities. However, several elements of the Wildcat Mountain Area made it a less than desirable site for programs and gathering of groups of people.

Access to the Wildcat Mountain area is difficult. There is a small parking lot off Monarch Boulevard, situated on the side of a significant incline. As traffic increased on Monarch over the years, access became more difficult and less safe. Also, the general topography of the Wildcat Mountain area is hilly. There are no flat areas suitable for the gathering of a moderate size group of people. Third, water was not readily available. When we offered our horse programs there, we pumped water from a Centennial Water and Sanitation well from about a quarter mile away. Additionally, the program and horse sites were immediately adjacent to Monarch Boulevard and the traffic noise made it difficult and certainly was not a pleasant customer experience. Last, a good portion of the area is closed for nine months of

the year due to nesting golden eagles that began nesting in the area in 2011 and have nested every year since. As a result of the changing conditions from 2002 to 2012, we began to look for other opportunities and areas to focus our educational efforts.

In 2016, we established the current “Base Camp” and “Horse Corrals” through a Site Improvement Plan. Base Camp is adjacent to the Highlands Ranch Law Enforcement Training Facility (HRLETF) and is the site where all our educational opportunities take place. Horse Corrals are less than a quarter mile from Santa Fe and on the far western border of the BWA, adjacent to Ron King Trail, a paved road that accesses the HRLETF. Both sites are accessed by the existing Ron King Trail Road and both sites are currently less than 10 acres.

The establishment of these two sites allowed us to offer full day, day camps. Our partnership with the neighboring HRLETF allowed us to use one of their buildings for emergency shelter in the event of a thunderstorm. Once we had one site, a home for our camps, horse lessons, and environmental education programs the quality of our programs increased greatly. Safety, operations, access, and customer experience were all greatly improved due to the establishment of the Horse Corrals and Base Camp sites.

In 2018, we completed an additional Site Plan for the construction of our archery range that is adjacent to our Horse Corrals and Base Camp. Collectively, the three components were named the Backcountry Outdoor Center.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

As our programs grew from 2010 until today, our focus on conservation of wildlife and their habitat grew as well. In 2010, our annual funding for natural resource management was approximately \$9,000 per year. Today, our funding for Natural Resource management is more than \$80,000 per year. The condition of our property, as far as habitat and value to wildlife, is vastly improved from previous decades. Vegetation management, cattle grazing management, added water resources, fire mitigation and brush management, forest management, and controlled access, have made the BWA a premier wildlife habitat along the Front Range.

We have more than twenty camera traps on the property that have captured hundreds of thousands of images of all wildlife over the past decade. We study those images to gather information such as animal populations, behavior, health, diversity, frequency of use, interactions, seasonal patterns, critical areas, and more, over the last decade.

It is significant that a lot of our habitat improvement work has been done in conjunction with volunteers. Close to 100 Eagle Scout Projects and thousands of volunteer hours have contributed greatly. Opportunities to experience the BWA come in many forms, and we continually strive to increase opportunities for the community to engage in a variety of ways.

In 2017, we established a 501c3 to supplement funding for the BWA. Through individual donors and corporate sponsors, we can add funding to both our natural resource management initiatives as well as our educational efforts. Today, the 501c3 contributes nearly \$100,000 to our annual budget.

In the 1990s, when the OSCA Plan was written, there was not one individual with expert knowledge about the property. There were several individuals with some knowledge of the property, and many

experts in their field that consulted and added extremely valuable input, but no one that had spent thousands of hours on the property was involved in the writing of the OSCA Plan. Today, we do have that expertise on the property.

Our Backcountry Wilderness Area Director, Mark Giebel, has been conducting research on the property since 2001. He has managed the operations on the property full time since 2009 and has spent countless hours observing wildlife in and around the BWA and in and around the two proposed Planning Areas. He understands the intricacies of wildlife and their use and patterns in the BWA simply because of the amount of time and number of years he has spent observing, working, monitoring camera traps, and studying every aspect of the property, its habitat and wildlife.

His observations include elk and turkey population monitoring. From 2010-2015 elk herd counts did not exceed 250 individuals. Now in 2022, elk herd counts exceed 400 individuals at times and there are no signs of overpopulation such as resource destruction or malnourished animals. The turkey population in 2010 was 32 individuals. Now, in 2022, the total number throughout the property is more than 100. It is common to see elk just outside of Base Camp and turkeys in Base Camp. Elk continue to winter in the same area adjacent to the Horse Corrals as they did before the Horse Corrals were built. The demonstrative success of those two species is indicative of the improved habitat conditions throughout the property. As we grew our programs at the Horse Corrals and Base Camp (proposed Planning Areas K and L respectively) our observations demonstrated that habitat and wildlife numbers were improving, not declining.

EXISTING PLANNING AREA OPPOSITION TO DEVELOPMENT

The proposed amendment to the HRPD is to reduce one Planning Area (Planning Area E) by 65 acres and create two new Planning Areas, K and L, with those 65 acres. Effectively, the proposal is to “swap” 65 acres that currently exist within the *Active Recreation and Public Facility Area* of OSCA for 65 acres that currently exist within the *7,000 acre Open Space Portion* of OSCA.

Planning Area E has allowed uses that are the same as Planning Areas B, D, and F, and mostly like Planning Area G as well. These areas total about 499 acres of the total 1,200 in the *Active Recreation and Public Facility Area* and allow for significant development such as churches, schools, recreation centers, and more with structures up to 50,000 square feet.

The ‘swap’ of the 65 acres would address the questions of administration offices and an equestrian center as those are allowed uses within Planning Areas B, D, E, F, and G, or the *Active Recreation and Public Facility Area* of OSCA. Offices are not explicitly mentioned, but it is assumed that administrative offices would be associated with uses such as schools, churches, and recreation centers.

When the OSCA Plan was written in the 1990s, Highlands Ranch was still in its infancy. Homes were just starting to be built south of Highlands Ranch Parkway and south of the intersection of Quebec and University. There was one high school. Castle Pines North did not exist. There were still wide-open plains and abundant wildlife throughout. Buffers and habitat were not in short supply and their importance not yet obviously significant in Highlands Ranch.

The OSCA Plan placed most of the Planning Areas in the area between Grigs Road and Monarch Boulevard, including Planning Areas D, E, and F. Areas B and G are adjacent to Grigs Road. The neighborhoods to the north of these areas (The Hearth and Firelight) and to the south (Castle Pines

North) would not be constructed until the late 2000s. Once those neighborhoods were built, the area between Grigs and Monarch, where the Planning Areas lie, became an important and valuable buffer. A buffer that provides habitat, valuable view sheds, and adds a rural aesthetic to an otherwise urban area. That importance and value to the communities was demonstrated in 2009 and again in 2016.

In 2009, there was a proposal brought to the community to build a University in Planning Area E, an allowed Use by Right for that area. That proposal met significant and strong opposition from both Highlands Ranch and Castle Pines North. The opposition provided great insight into the importance of that buffer, wildlife, and open space to both communities.

Further insight into the community's opposition to development in that area occurred in 2016 when the HRCA completed a conceptual plan to build education and recreation facilities just off Grigs Road. Again, both Highlands Ranch and Castle Pines North noted several points of opposition to the project including impact to wildlife, light pollution concerns, and increased traffic on Grigs Rd and adjacent roads in both communities. A cost estimate analysis by the HRCA also revealed that utility infrastructure was inadequate or cost prohibitive and access off Grigs Road was also likely cost prohibitive.

It is important to note that Planning Area E also serves as habitat to a special elk herd. In 2009, the Planning Area E elk herd was about 30 individuals. This elk herd is a resident herd meaning it does not move or travel far from its home. Unlike other herds throughout the BWA that move between various properties, crosses roads and even highways, this herd stays where it is for nearly the entire year. Today, the Planning Area E elk herd is over 60 individuals.

WHY TWO NEW PLANNING AREAS ARE SUITABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT

The two proposed new Planning Areas (K and L) meet the same criteria as the existing Planning Areas B, D, E, F, and G as far as soil type, slope less than 15% (slopes are even less than 8% at K and L), flood plain exclusion, rock fall hazards, and of course, impact to wildlife.

The OSCA Plan divides the property into four categories for wildlife habitat value. From the best habitat value down, each area is ranked as best, better, good, or marginal. The existing Planning Areas are in "better" habitat. The proposed Planning Areas K and L are in "marginal" habitat, or, in other words, the worst habitat the property has to offer.

Also, in Douglas County's Comprehensive Master Plan, Map 9.1, (Wildlife Resources) the proposed Planning Areas K and L are shown to be in "Low Habitat Value" and "Moderate Habitat Value" on that map.

With the above facts, Planning Areas K and L could have easily been part of the original planning areas. In the 30 years since the OSCA Plan was written, they have become even more suitable for the Planning Areas and are now arguably the most easily developed, and most suitable areas, on the entire property. It is believed that the main reasons why proposed Planning Areas K and L were not included in the original Planning Areas is because of two factors: the cattle grazing operation in the 1990s and that the area would eventually be the home to the Law Enforcement Training Facility.

Our existing Horse Corrals were originally corrals for the cattle operation where cattle were loaded and unloaded. The cattle operation, at the time, was of major significance to the property. When the

property was turned over to the HRCA, the cattle lease in place was the only source of revenue from the property. Over the last decade, cattle numbers have been deliberately decreased by about 75% as natural resource management and conservation became a higher priority. It has been proven over the past decade that the cattle operation does not need a permanent loading and unloading site. We have worked with the lessee to find other methods that have worked out great. Today, the cattle operation is still an important part of the Backcountry but does not have to impact or guide the use of the property as it may have when the OSCA Plan was written in the 1990s.

Also, the Highlands Ranch Law Enforcement Training Facility (HRLETF) was likely a factor in not including K and L in the original Planning Areas. The idea was likely to keep people away from the HRLETF so that its operations would not be impacted or criticized. Over the last decade though, the HRCA and HRLETF have proven to be compatible neighbors; a relationship that was thought to be unlikely. Due to the careful planning of the HRLETF, the superb maintenance of their facilities, and stringent safety protocols, the increased use of the areas surrounding the HRLETF have proven to work out favorably for everyone involved, including the customers. There are many efficiencies gained, both financial and operational, by working closely with the HRLETF which benefit both organizations. Our Horse Corrals, Base Camp, and Archery Ranges are all within sight and audible distance of the HRLETF and we receive very little, if any, negative feedback from our customers. Additionally, dozens of homes were built in the 2000's on land bordering the Backcountry Wilderness Area just to the south, and overlooking the HRLETF, demonstrating that in the 30 years since the OSCA Plan was written, development near the HRLETF is acceptable.

By focusing our programs in two areas K and L, our impact to the rest of the habitat and property has decreased over time, even as our programs grew. This is in large part because the proposed new Planning Areas, K and L, are in the perfect locations as far as wildlife conservation is concerned. We understood that in 2016 when we established the Horse Corrals and Base Camp, and in 2018 when we added the Archery Range, and our observations since have only solidified that understanding and is why we are pursuing the proposal to amend the Highlands Ranch Planned Development.

The following demonstrate why the proposed Planning Areas K and L are good sites for development:

- Highlands Ranch Law Enforcement Training Facility (HRLETF)
 - The relationship between the HRLETF and the HRCA is an important reason for the success of our programs at the Horse Corrals and Base Camp. We have official agreements in place for various services and cooperative initiatives.
 - The HRLETF maintains Ron King Trail, a paved, private road that connects to Highway 85. They also plow in the winter.
 - The HRLETF currently allows our programs to use one of their classroom buildings for emergency shelter when the need arises.
 - The numerous safety protocols at their ranges ensure that areas surrounding their property are safe. Noise from the ranges does not impact our day-to-day operations.
 - The HRLETF is the most intensely used portion of the Backcountry in the entire 8,200 acres. It is logical to cluster intense use in the same area, rather than to spread it out in different areas of the property. Planning Areas K and L are adjacent to the HRLETF property, use the same access, and concentrate human impacts in one single area. The rest of the property and its wildlife benefits from this concentration.

- The HRCA uses HRLETF infrastructure to provide Wi-Fi access that ensures reliable communication at our sites and allows our security cameras to operate, record, and be visible remotely. Overall safety is greatly enhanced.
 - The HRCA and HRLETF plan to increase their infrastructure sharing agreement. HRCA will link to the LETF's existing fiber line to provide fiber/communication capabilities to the building site in Planning Area L.
 - The HRLETF is its own water district. They obtain raw water from an existing Centennial Water and Sanitation line and treat water on site to provide potable water. The HRCA and HRLETF, through Centennial Water and Sanitation, plan on cooperating to provide water to the building site in Planning Area L. Ground/well water will not be needed at proposed Planning Area L.
- Access
 - Areas are directly accessed from Highway 85 and an existing, paved road (Ron King Trail) from Highway 85
 - Electric
 - Electric infrastructure exists at both Planning Area K and L sites
 - Water
 - The HRLETF would provide water, through their existing system. HRCA and HRLETF would expand that system to serve the proposed needs. HRLETF obtains raw water from a Centennial Water and Sanitation Pipeline through the property.
 - Planning Area K has its own well, owned by the HRCA, that provides water to the horses and would continue to do so. There would not be significantly more water needed than what is used today. Potable water at that site is not necessary.
 - Impact to Others
 - The location of Planning Areas K and L are remote. Planning Area L is somewhat, but not easily visible to one private residence that is nearly a half mile away from the proposed building site.
 - Planning Area K is visible to less than a dozen homes, the closest is approximately 500 feet away.
 - Traffic
 - Ron King Trail is a private road and therefore any traffic increase does not impact the public.
 - The impact on Highway 85 traffic is inconsequential due to the extremely high volume of traffic that already exists on Highway 85.
 - A traffic impact study was completed in November, 2021.
 - Central Location
 - With easy access off Highway 85 the location is convenient for all of NW Douglas County including Roxborough, Sterling Ranch, Sedalia, Louviers, Castle Rock, and Highlands Ranch.
 - Impact to Wildlife is Minimal
 - Planning Area L is approximately 800 feet from Highway 85 and therefore of very little value as far as habitat and wildlife value. It is perfectly situated on the far west border of the Backcountry.
 - Planning Area K is situated in a topographic bowl shielding the surrounding habitat from visual impacts, as well as sound. It is also adjacent to the HRLETF and two residences that serve the HRLETF.

- Both proposed Planning Areas K and L are in the worst habitat as ranked and mapped in the OSCA Plan and in “Moderate” or “Low” habitat value as ranked in the Douglas County Comprehensive Master Plan 2040 Wildlife Resources map.
- Both proposed Planning Areas K and L are in the most intense human impact area that exists in the entire BWA due to the HRLETF use as well as our existing Base Camp, Horse Corrals, and Archery Range.
- Many open space properties allow for development of trails throughout the entire property. The Backcountry uses also allow for trails throughout the entire property. Recent research has shown that recreational uses, such as trails, are highly impactful to wildlife. Our observations on the Backcountry property coincide with those findings.
- By focusing our minimal impact in these relatively small areas, controlling the intensity and timing both hourly and seasonal, our impact to the rest of the property is lessened.

PROPOSED USES OF PLANNING AREAS K AND L

Although Planning Areas B, D, E, F, and G have broad and intense uses that allow schools, churches, recreation centers and much more, with structures up to 50,000 square feet, the proposed uses of Planning Areas K and L are proposed to be much more limited and reduced in scope.

The proposed uses include the uses that are allowed in the *7,000 acre Open Space Area* such as agricultural, public and quasi-public facilities, and recreational facilities like trails and camps.

Planning Area K (existing Horse Corrals site) details an Equestrian Center with existing outdoor arenas and a proposed indoor arena not to exceed 20,000 square feet and overall site not to exceed 20 acres.

Planning Area L (existing Base Camp site) details a nature preschool, administrative offices, and a classroom/event space in a building less than 20,000 square feet along with associated structures. Planning Area L is proposed to be 45 acres.

WHAT IS ALLOWED NOW VS WHAT WOULD BE ALLOWED WITH THE PROPOSED PLANNING AREAS

The intent of this amendment is to swap 65 acres from the Active Recreation and Public Facility Area to the *7000-acre Open Space Area*. The allowed uses would be defined to fit current terms, definitions, and needs of the community.

The land that is the proposed Planning Areas K and L is currently classified as part of the *7000-acre Open Space Area* of the property in the OSCA Plan. The *7000-acre Open Space Area* does have certain allowed uses which are significant and intense. Along with other uses, here are the most significant, current, allowed uses which demonstrate that our proposals are not far off from, or out of line as far as intensity of use, than what was originally contemplated.

Agriculture: Cattle, buffalo, and horse ranching including raising, breeding, feeding, and selling of livestock and other animals pending review and associated structures.

Water and wastewater treatment plants not exceeding 100,000 gallon capacity

“Community camps for all ages....Limited overnight camping and structures up to 10,000 square feet per camp for dining, restrooms, changing rooms, showers, enclosed storage, seating areas, tent pads, and associated improvements...”

All three of the general uses outlined above would have significant impact to the property if constructed. The first two are industrial uses with an extremely heavy footprint, many associated structures, buildings, machines and high levels of noise and visual impacts. The least significant would be “Community Camps” and what we are proposing is even less significant.

As written in the OSCA Plan and quoted above, multiple structures up to 10,000 square feet are allowed in the 7000-acre Open Space Area for “Community Camps.” The way the “Community Camps” term was written, and discussed in the meetings that formed the OSCA Plan, it was contemplated that schools from all over Douglas County and neighboring communities would send their students to these “Community Camps.” There was not a limit of days, or seasonal aspect to that allowed use. A successful program, that called for and allowed multiple structures up to 10,000 square feet would have needed to operate daily, with a different school group present each day through the school year. It was understood at the time that an entire grade from a school would typically visit; about 50-200 kids at a time, daily, year around. The uses we are proposing are not more intense than what was originally contemplated in the OSCA Plan.

The OSCA Plan was written three decades ago. Thirty years ago it was hard to imagine that outdoor activities and education would be as valuable to our County as they are today. Thirty years ago, outdoor programs were not as critical because kids were outside, local youth had easy access to nature and ample space to explore, play freely, develop imaginations, and be active.

Also, over the past 30 years, “preschool” and formal preschool programs became normalized, along with childcare, day camps, and other terms and needs that are not explicitly defined in the OSCA Plan. Instead of those terms, the term used in the OSCA Plan was “Community Camps for all ages” and “Supervised Educational Opportunities.”

Today, there is research that shows direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development. But many, if not most children do not have easy access to nature. There is research that shows nature enhances a child’s brain development, improves academic performance, enhances communication, provides mental health benefits, and more. Yet access to nature is severely limited.

That is why our camps have grown to maximum capacity and have waitlists of children we cannot serve and who will not reap the benefits of the exposure to nature. It is why “nature preschools” have blown up across America and the State of Colorado has amended preschool licenses to allow for “mobile preschools” to provide that outdoor connection to preschoolers.

With this amendment, to allow the proposed uses, we have an opportunity to impact the County’s children in so many positive ways. We have a chance to offer a unique preschool that no one else in the County can offer at this time: a building-based Nature Preschool that can serve 60 of our county’s children, year around. “Community Camps” was defined as “for all ages” in the OSCA Plan which would include preschool age children.

The addition of a preschool is not far off from what was contemplated with the allowed use of “Community Camps for all ages.” Preschool, and early childhood education and day care have certainly

seen a spike in demand over the past 30 years. The State licensing professionals refer to the current lack of preschools as a “childcare desert.” They added that basically any preschool that opens fills up quickly due to the extreme demand. And that no matter what our capacity was, it would fill. Our proposal is in line with the vision statement in the OSCA Plan: “No plan is forever. Both our natural resources and our society are dynamic and subject to change and our planning process reflects this. When conditions and problems change enough, new planning with public participation will begin.”

Society has changed and conditions have changed. This is a problem where the HRCA and Backcountry Wilderness Area can help provide a solution for our community that is also in line with the OSCA Plan and our mission.

SUMMARY

We manage the Backcountry Wilderness Area with three main pillars in mind: Conservation, Education, and Recreation. Each pillar plays a part in the future conservation of the Backcountry. The Recreation opportunities provided through our trails and horseback riding, as well as the educational programs we offer at Base Camp and the Horse Corrals, serve to connect our Douglas County community to nature, to conservation, and to the Backcountry itself.

By connecting people - especially kids - to the Backcountry, we ensure its future conservation as those that have experienced it will certainly want to protect it in the future. The educational component should not be undervalued in the endeavor of future conservation of the BWA and properties like it throughout Douglas County. Our next generation of conservationists are growing up in Douglas County right now. Our proposed amendment is to boost our educational efforts in the BWA and the capacity of those we reach with the message of conservation, which ultimately benefits the community and entire County.

There is a quote by Richard Louv, author of the book *Last Child In The Woods*, that summarizes our educational efforts: “Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young, it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.

Thirty years ago, if the research regarding nature and children’s development and well-being was available, if “screen time” was a phrase, if nature-based preschools even existed, if close-to-home nature activities were as rare, and if we had the information we have today about the Backcountry Wilderness Area property, the OSCA Plan would have likely included uses that we are proposing, in the location where we are proposing them.