

# Executive Summary

## *SOUTH TABLE MOUNTAIN PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN*



### Jefferson County Open Space Mission

To provide a living resource of open space lands and waters throughout Jefferson County for the physical, psychological, recreational and social enjoyment of present and future generations.

# ***Executive Summary: South Table Mountain Park Management Plan***

## **Park Location and Description**

South Table Mountain is a scenic and historical landmark located between U.S. Highway 58 on the north and Interstate 70 on the south, immediately east of the City of Golden and approximately ten miles west of the City of Denver. The mountain is located in the geographic transition between the Great Plains and the foothills of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains and rises approximately 700 vertical feet above the surrounding landscape. The top of the mountain is relatively flat and slopes gently from east to west, and the mountain is rimmed with 10 to 50 foot tall escarpments that are vertical or near vertical. The mountain's side slopes and its prominent cliff-bands, along with North Table Mountain's, are considered regionally important scenic features and are part of the Front Range Mountain Backdrop/Foreground Preservation area. They define the landscape immediately around the Golden area, and are geologically unique in the Front Range. The top of the mountain affords views of the foothills, North Table Mountain, Green Mountain, the Denver metropolitan area, as well as the distant plains. With the mountain's relief, its various slope aspects, and its unique geology, it provides habitat for many native plant and animal species. Jefferson County Open Space has preserved and manages 1,493 acres of land.

Facilities at the Park include:

- Mini kiosk routed-wood area identification sign at Foothills Circle
- Signs marking private property
- Trash can at Foothills Circle
- Park bench at Foothills Circle
- Gated maintenance vehicle access at Foothills Circle
- Gated maintenance vehicle access at Quaker Street
- Approximately 2.56 miles of trails.

## **Park Vision**

South Table Mountain Park has one Management Unit Designation:

The Natural Area Management Unit comprises the entire acreage and includes the fee simple portion and trail corridors that cross the Conservation Easements. These areas are managed primarily for multiple-use, trail-based recreation, but not to the detriment of the natural and cultural resources. These resources include native plant species, paleontological resources, a resident herd of mule deer and Golden Eagle nest sites. Seasonal trail closures are possible and would be utilized to help protect cliff nesting raptor sites. To facilitate effective management of South Table Mountain Park, Jefferson County Open Space will cooperate with adjacent public and private landowners and with owners of the land held by Conservation Easements.

Visitors to South Table Mountain Park will be able to enjoy the wide open and scenic landscape from an improved and well defined multi-use loop trail system. The experience of the local community will be supported with continued access from their neighborhoods. These neighborhood access points are provided and spread out around the mesa to help disperse trail use, minimize user conflicts and create a convenient and remote experience.

The Conceptual Plan is to develop a large loop trail system that includes portions of the Welch Ditch trail as well as trails in corridors across the State and USA/Department of Energy Conservation Easements along with roads on the former Coors and Chippewa properties. The natural and cultural resources were identified so that trails do not compromise these resources and instead take advantage of the scenic and interpretive opportunities. Existing jeep roads and social trails will be utilized for trails where possible to minimize disturbance to the landscape. Remaining jeep roads and social trails not used as trails will be closed and reclaimed. There are two proposed Parking areas with Trailhead Amenities. The existing parking facilities at the Pleasant View Community Park at Camp George West will be utilized and a new parking area is proposed on the former Chippewa property along Quaker Street. Favorable terrain conditions exist at these two parking and trailhead areas and therefore no trail use speed differential or yield concerns arise. Neighborhood access will continue from the Foothills Circle trailhead and from West 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue near Rolling Hills. Also two neighborhood access points from the Camden Condominiums are proposed in lieu of existing social trails. Two neighborhood access points from Golden Hills Road (Chippewa) as well as neighborhood access from Rimrock Drive, Lookout View Court and the Lubahn Trail (City of Golden) are proposed. Access to the cliff rim of the Golden Properties Conservation Easement the “no public access” areas on the former Coors property and to and through private property will be discouraged.

### **Natural and Cultural Resources**

- Regionally significant scenic feature
- Unique geology of the Table Mountains
- Significant paleontological resources at eastern slope of mountain (paleontological study underway as part of the 2007 Cultural Resource Inventory)
- Three major plant community types: grasslands, shrublands, riparian
- Rare and imperiled mountain mahogany/needle-and-thread grass community type in the southeast corner of the State of Colorado Conservation Easement
- Unusual low-elevation aspen stand
- Significant infestations of diffuse knapweed, Canada thistle, and Dalmation toadflax
- Resident population of mule deer with migration corridors on the southeast and northwest slopes of the mountain
- Golden Eagle cliff-nests on north rim on Golden Properties Easement
- The “amphitheater, the stone-bridge, and the bunker,” built by the Works Projects Administration and now a National Registered Historic Site, located on USA/Department of Energy land outside of the Conservation Easement

- Historical remains of resort on private property at west rim of mountain (see Historical Summary)
- The Class III Cultural Resource Inventory was conducted on the fee simple portion of the park in 2007. A total of seven sites and eighteen isolated finds were identified and recorded. Two of the sites were prehistoric Open Lithic Scatters with the remaining five sites being considered historic in nature. The isolated finds are artifacts thought to represent isolated instances of human activity.
- The Welch and Agricultural Ditches are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. (Class III Cultural Resource Inventory 2007)
- The old quarry site may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places but requires more study since a portion is on private property. (Class III Cultural Resource Inventory 2007)

### **Visitation and Use Trends**

South Table Mountain Park receives heavy recreational use. There is a trailhead (with no formal parking) at the end of Foothills Circle Drive that provides access to the mesa top (JCOS, NREL & State of Colorado Conservation Easements). Also accessed here is the Welch Ditch, which is heavily utilized as a recreational trail. Several social trails and old roads radiate from JCOS property out onto the neighboring Conservation Easements, as well as the adjoining private lands. A trail system is planned to provide park visitors with improved loop trail opportunities in conjunction with recently constructed access trails from the south and north. Although no formal trail access exists, the top of the mountain is also accessed via Quaker Street north of South Golden Road. Social trails that lead to the area are numerous and originate near the National Renewable Energy Laboratories (NREL), the Denver West development to the southeast of the mountain as well as from private drives in Rolling Hills Country Club. Overall, the trail plan addresses each of these locations and will result in formalized access and new trail opportunities in appropriate locations throughout the park. Most visitors are presently hikers, dog walkers, and mountain bikers.

### **Park Capacity**

There are no parking spaces currently available that are managed by Open Space. Some parking is available at the new Pleasant View Community Park at Camp George West, which is managed by Pleasant View Metro District and located south of NREL. A trail connects this parking area through an Easement on NREL property to the south side of the Park. Additionally, a trailhead with parking is being planned for the former Chippewa property off of Quaker Street. There is no data being collected in the way of user counts and surveys at this time. This is anticipated to occur in the next several years to coincide with expanding trail development and available parking.

## **Management Units**

Open Space lands are classified into management units according to ecosystem and cultural resource protection requirements, and their capability and suitability to provide opportunities for visitor experiences.

Open Space staff have adopted three land classifications:

- 1) **Sensitive Areas** are those that are very special, fragile, and highly valued for their natural or cultural features. There are no designated Sensitive Areas on South Table Mountain Park, however because there are provisions for “no access areas” on the former Coors property and the Golden Properties Conservation Easement, protection of these identified resources is in place.
- 2) **Natural Areas** are relatively large areas where ecological processes dominate and humans can typically experience a sense of solitude and remoteness. South Table Mountain’s Natural Area is located within the fee simple portions of the mountain as well as within the recreational trail corridor that crosses the Conservation Easement portions of the mountain.
- 3) **Parkland Recreation Areas** provide opportunities for a wide variety of outdoor recreation experiences while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the natural resources. There are no Parkland Recreation Areas on South Table Mountain Park.

## **Park Operations**

On-site management of South Table Mountain Park is predominantly the responsibility of Open Space’s Park Services section. The Park Services section and each of its subsections utilize operational documents to guide their management activities. A list of these documents can be found in Appendix B.

## **Park Issues and Management Approaches**

Attached is the Concept Plan, Appendix A, and the Management Directions (a portion of Chapter IV) which briefly describes the major issues that have been identified by Open Space staff and the management approaches selected to respond to those issues.