Outdoor Insights
April 2015 JEFFERSON COUNTY OPEN SPACE Volume 5, Edition 3

Trail Difficulty Ratings

Know before you go to have the best trail experience

As the closest outdoor foothills experience next to the largest population center, Jeffco Open Space is both the playground of the metro area and an attractive benefit for visitors to Colorado and businesses that are looking to locate to this active area.

As we encourge residents and visitors to take part in the healthy nature-based experiences we provide, their success is dependent on knowing what they are going to experience.

Trail Difficulty Ratings goals

1. Provide information for safe and enjoyable visitor experiences
2. Maintain and build trails based on the rating and experience desired

Within Jeffco Open Space, not all trails are alike.

Trail Surface Types

Natural surface - also referred to as soft surface - and are typically a dirt tread.

Crusher Fines
A second type of trail utilizes imported material such as crushed granite or gravel to assist in drainage. These trails are referred to as crusher fines treads.

Paved
The most durable are the paved trails in either concrete or an asphalt road base.

Trail Surface Types

Natural Surface

Crusher Fines Surface

Paved Surface

Trail Difficulty Ratings

Least Difficult
grades under 6%
few obstacles
gentle elevation change

More Difficult
grades 6-10%
some obstacles
rolling elevation change

Most Difficult
grades over 10%
many obstacles
steep elevation change

Taking the successful color and shape coding used by ski areas to differentiate ski and snowboard trails, Jeffco Open Space has adopted a similar program to identify Least Difficult, More Difficult and Most Difficult trails using objective criteria. These criteria include grade, obstacles and elevation change with length and surface type contributing factors.

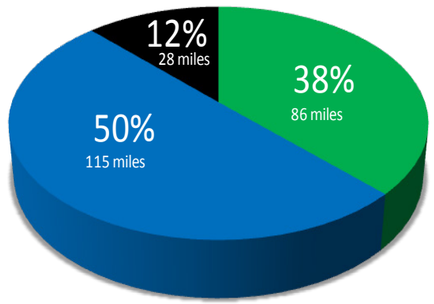
Gentle rolling trails of any surface type, particularly those found within the more urban parts of Jefferson County will likely be designated as Least Difficult ●. Often these will be paved for durability from the greater number of trail users and all weather use patterns.

Trails that have greater elevation change over a shorter distance or contain more obstacles such as rocks and roots may be rated as a More Difficult ■ or Most Difficult ◆based on more obstacles and steeper terrain.

It is important to note that the criteria used to determine trail difficulty ratings has assigned a blue or More Difficult ■ rating to trails that might be closer to black or Most Difficult ◆. Conversely, some blue or More Difficult trails may be closer but exceed the criteria for green trails or Least Difficult ● rated trails.

All JCOS Trails

● Least Difficult ■ More Difficult ♦ Most Difficult



How Difficulty Ratings are Determined

Characteristics	Criteria			
Average Grade	**<3%**	**3.1-5%**	**5.1-10%**	**>10.1%**
	0	1	2	3
Maximum Grade	**< 8%**	**8.1-10 %**	**10.1-15%**	**>15%**
	0	2	3	4
Elevation (sum of gain and loss)	**< 100ft**	**< 500ft**	**< 1000ft**	**> 1000ft**
	0	1	2	3
Presence of obstacles	**None (N)**	**May be Present (MP)**	**Present and Unavoidable (PU)**	**Abundant and Unavoidable (AU)**
	0	1	2	4
Surface type (imported vs. natural)	**Concrete, Asphalt, Crusher Fines, Mulch**	**Natural**		
	0	1		
Average altitude of trail @ midpoint	**< 7,500 ft**	**>7,500 ft**		
	0	1		
Segment distance	**< 2.0 miles**	**> 2.1 miles**		
	0	1		

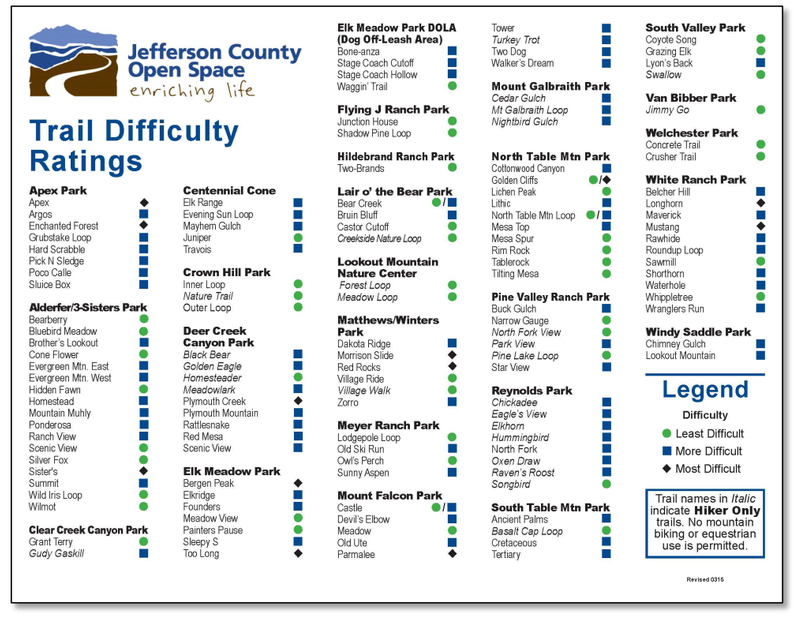
Difficulty Rating	Symbol Color	Symbol	Total Criteria Score
Least Difficult (Beginner)	Green	●	0 to 5
More Difficult (Intermediate)	Blue	■	6 to 10
Most Difficult (Advanced)	Black	♦	11+

Following the assignment of trail difficulty ratings to all Jeffco Open Space trails, staff took inventory of how many trails were
Least Difficult ● (38% or 87 miles);
More Difficult ■ (50% or 115 miles); and
Most Difficult ◆ (12% or 27 miles).

Questions posed for future research and evaluation from this data may be:

1. Is this the right distribution of trail difficulty ratings for our present and future visitors?

2. Is it responsible to create Least Difficult ● trails with greater resource impact in terrain more suitable for More Difficult ■ rated trails?



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Trail Difficulty Ratings

Apex Park
Apex ◆
Argos ■
Enchanted Forest ◆
Grubstake Loop ■
Hard Scrabble ■
Pick N Sledge ■
Poco Calle ■
Sluice Box ■

Alderfer/3-Sisters Park
Bearberry ●
Bluebird Meadow ●
Brother's Lookout ■
Cone Flower ●
Evergreen Mtn. East ■
Evergreen Mtn. West ■
Hidden Fawn ●
Homestead ■
Mountain Muhly ■
Ponderosa ■
Ranch View ■
Scenic View ●
Silver Fox ●
Sister's ◆
Summit ■
Wild Iris Loop ●
Wilmot ●

Clear Creek Canyon Park
Grant Terry ●
Gudy Gaskill ■

Centennial Cone
Elk Range ■
Evening Sun Loop ■
Mayhem Gulch ■
Juniper ●
Travois ■

Crown Hill Park
Inner Loop ●
Nature Trail ●
Outer Loop ●

Deer Creek Canyon Park
Black Bear ■
Golden Eagle ■
Homesteader ●
Meadowlark ■
Plymouth Creek ◆
Plymouth Mountain ■
Rattlesnake ■
Red Mesa ■
Scenic View ■

Elk Meadow Park
Bergen Peak ◆
Elkridge ■
Founders ■
Meadow View ●
Painters Pause ●
Sleepy S ■
Too Long ◆

Elk Meadow Park DOLA (Dog Off-Leash Area)
Bone-anza ■
Stage Coach Cutoff ■
Stage Coach Hollow ■
Waggin' Trail ●

Flying J Ranch Park
Junction House ●
Shadow Pine Loop ●

Hildebrand Ranch Park
Two-Brands ●

Lair o' the Bear Park
Bear Creek ●/■
Bruin Bluff ■
Castor Cutoff ●
Creekside Nature Loop ●

Lookout Mountain Nature Center
Forest Loop ●
Meadow Loop ●

Matthews/Winters Park
Dakota Ridge ■
Morrison Slide ◆
Red Rocks ◆
Village Ride ●
Village Walk ●
Zorro ■

Meyer Ranch Park
Lodgepole Loop ●
Old Ski Run ■
Owl's Perch ●
Sunny Aspen ■

Mount Falcon Park
Castle ●/■
Devil's Elbow ■
Meadow ●
Old Ute ■
Parmalee ◆
Tower ■
Turkey Trot ■
Two Dog ■
Walker's Dream ■

Mount Galbraith Park
Cedar Gulch ■
Mt Galbraith Loop ■
Nightbird Gulch ■

North Table Mtn Park
Cottonwood Canyon ■
Golden Cliffs ●/◆
Lichen Peak ●
Lithic ■
North Table Mtn Loop ●/■
Mesa Top ■
Mesa Spur ●
Rim Rock ●
Tablerock ●
Tilting Mesa ●

Pine Valley Ranch Park
Buck Gulch ■
Narrow Gauge ●
North Fork View ●
Park View ■
Pine Lake Loop ●
Star View ■

Reynolds Park
Chickadee ■
Eagle's View ■
Elkhorn ■
Hummingbird ■
North Fork ■
Oxen Draw ■
Raven's Roost ■
Songbird ●

South Table Mtn Park
Ancient Palms ■
Basalt Cap Loop ●
Cretaceous ■
Tertiary ■

South Valley Park
Coyote Song ●
Grazing Elk ●
Lyon's Back ■
Swallow ●

Van Bibber Park
Jimmy Go ●

Welchester Park
Concrete Trail ●
Crusher Trail ●

White Ranch Park
Belcher Hill ■
Longhorn ◆
Maverick ■
Mustang ◆
Rawhide ■
Roundup Loop ■
Sawmill ●
Shorthorn ■
Waterhole ■
Whippletree ●
Wranglers Run ■

Windy Saddle Park
Chimney Gulch ■
Lookout Mountain ■

Legend
Difficulty
● Least Difficult
■ More Difficult
◆ Most Difficult

Trail names in *Italic* indicate **Hiker Only** trails. No mountain biking or equestrian use is permitted.

Revised 0315

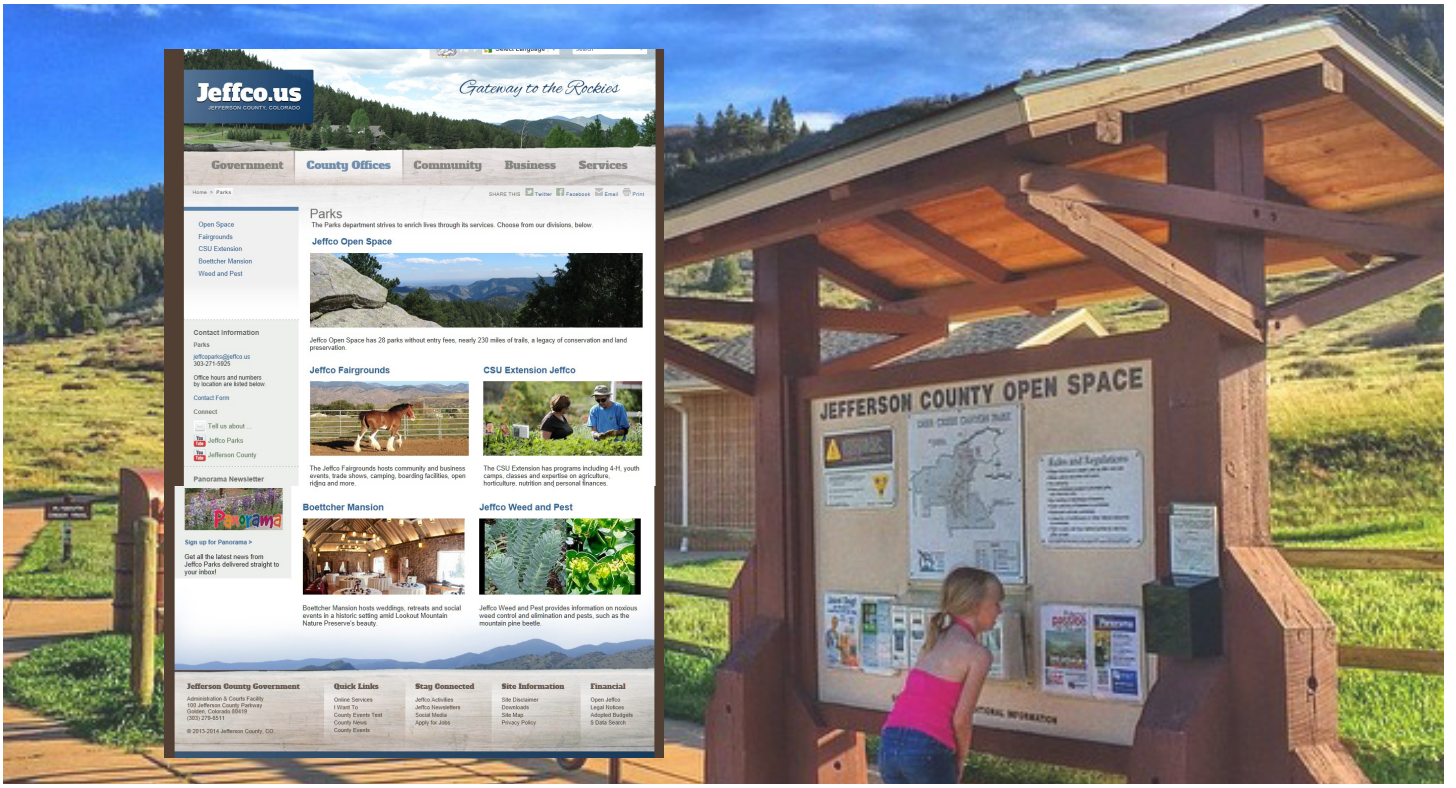
How to know before you go

There are a number of ways a visitor to Jeffco Open Space can get information about the Parks and Trails including the website *www.jeffco.us/parks,* park map brochures, information kiosks at trailheads, and trail signage. Visitors tell us that they usually get information about Jeffco Open Space either at the park or on the website. Trail rating icons will be appearing in each of these communication tools so visitors are able to know before they go. As trail wayfinding signs are replaced in the parks, you'll find in the lower right hand corner an icon that represents the difficutly rating of that trail segment.

To learn more about trail difficulty ratings in Jeffco Open Space Parks, contact Dave Davenport, Outdoor Recreation Management Coordinator, at 303-271-5915 or *ddavenpo@jeffco.us*

Correlating Material

The Trail Difficulty Ratings are also related to the Jeffco Open Space Annual Trails Assessment that helps identify areas that are a priority for trail maintenance; opportunities for volunteer stewardship projects and a communication tool for user expectations on the maintenance standard for a particular trail. For additional information regarding the *Annual Trails Assessment*, see the **Outdoor Insights** on this topic.



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A topical newsletter, Outdoor Insights provides information on Colorado's Jefferson County Open Space projects, programs and activities. For more information, contact Communications Manager Thea Rock, trock@jeffco.us or (303) 271-5902. Read past issues on a variety of topics at jeffco.us/parks.