

Deer Creek Open Space Interim Management Plan

JULY 2016

Introduction

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails acquired the Deer Creek Open Space in July of 2015. The property, located at 2553 Lower River Rd, Snowmass, CO, offers local agriculture, view plane preservation, recreational access to the Roaring Fork River and Forest Service lands, a riparian area and water rights - all important elements of the Open Space and Trails program. The property was immediately closed to public access until adoption of a management plan.

Existing Conditions

Deer Creek Open Space is comprised of approximately 38 acres, spanning the Roaring Fork River, the Rio Grande Trail and Highway 82 in the Woody Creek area. It connects to Forest Service lands to the northeast, and to Parks and Wildlife lands to the southwest. The property includes a main house, a guesthouse, a barn, multiple ponds, water rights, an irrigation system, hay fields, and river riparian area.

The Open Space property is located at the mouth of Arbaney Gulch. The majority of the gulch is located on Forest Service land with a historic two-track road, which has narrowed to a singletrack trail. The Forest Service does not currently recognize the gulch trail as a route. There are also two Roaring Fork River fishing easements held by Open Space and Trails, to either side of the Deer Creek property.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has mapped the Arbaney Gulch area and surrounding Forest Service lands as severe Elk Winter Range. The property itself is identified as severe winter range Mule Deer habitat by CPW.

Partner Comments

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails staff met with Forest Service and CPW to start the assessment of the wildlife habitat on and surrounding Deer Creek Open Space and discussion ensued about the future of the housing units. CPW staff were interested in looking at a long-term lease on the Deer Creek property. CPW has had a difficult time finding housing for its division wildlife officer in the Aspen area, and the potential to have a horse pasture is very appealing. CPW is willing to take on the necessary improvements in order to bring the main house back up to livable standards, maintain the water rights, modify the ponds to be more

wildlife friendly, manage noxious weeds, and monitor wildlife use of the property and surrounding area.

Management Actions

10-Year Lease Agreement (Long-Term Lease).

OST will work out a 10-year Intergovernmental Agreement with CPW for approximately 17 acres of the Deer Creek property (see attached map). CPW's responsibilities will include: maintaining the County's water rights and managing the irrigation system, maintaining the pasture in existing or improved condition, maintaining the main house in a livable condition, upgrading the septic system to Pitkin County codes, managing noxious weeds, modifying existing concrete-lined ponds to be more wildlife friendly and monitoring wildlife use of the property and Arbaney Gulch area. CPW will be allowed to pasture up to 4 horses on the property.

2-Year Lease Agreement (Short-Term Lease)

OST will work out a 2-year lease agreement in the Intergovernmental Agreement with CPW for the remainder of the property between the Roaring Fork River and the Forest Service boundary. The 2-year lease agreement area will include public fishing access. CPW will be responsible for noxious weed management and wildlife use monitoring in this area.

Public Access

Once the Intergovernmental Agreement is signed, the public will be allowed fishing access to the Roaring Fork River from the Rio Grande Trail, as identified on the map. There is no public parking. The public is not allowed in the Long-Term Lease area or to access the surrounding Forest Service lands via the property. The area east of Lower River Road is closed to the public until a full management plan is adopted.

Full Management Plan

A full management planning process will begin in 2018. CPW will collaborate with Open Space and Trails on the development of the plan, providing valuable insight on how the property functions and how the surrounding habitats are utilized. The full management plan will incorporate public and partner comments.

Additional Regulations

Title 12, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails regulations for all properties and trails, is applicable for the public use of the fishing access area. No commercial or special use is allowed until a full management plan is adopted.

Pitkin County will explore giving CPW reciprocal jurisdiction to enforce Pitkin County's rules and regulations in Title 12.