

## Soapstone Prairie Natural Area Fact Sheet

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### Location:

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area lies south of the Colorado/Wyoming border, approximately five miles west of I-25, and 25 miles directly north of the City.



### Travel time:

It will take approximately 45 minutes to reach the anticipated main entrance at the south central edge of the property.

### Size:

Soapstone Prairie Natural Area encompasses a total of 18,778 acres (an area greater than 29 square miles).

### Purchase Cost:

Less than \$11.1 million or \$593/acre. (Urban natural areas such as Cathy Fromme Prairie cost over \$5000/acre)

### Funding Source:

- Sales tax revenues from the City's Building Community Choices and the City's portion of Larimer County's - Help Preserve Open Space initiatives. These revenue sources are dedicated to the City's Natural Areas Program.

### Conservation Values:

- **Natural** - Relatively undisturbed shortgrass and mixed-grass prairie grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas, and shrublands that provide prime essential wildlife habitat for migrating, as well as resident, wildlife. By the end of 2006:
  - 113 species of birds recorded onsite.
  - 219 species of native plants identified.
- **Recreational** – Non-motorized only: walking, hiking, biking, horseback riding, mountain biking, wildlife watching, etc.
- **Scenic** - Fantastic views of the high plains steppe to the east, Fort Collins to the south, and foothills and the Mummy Range to the west. At the western ridge, incredible views of the “Big Hole.”
- **Agricultural** - Ranching heritage - this land has been used for sheep and cattle grazing for more than 150 years. Grazing will continue to be a part of the management plan.
- **Geological** - Cliffs, unique rock formations, canyons, arroyos, intermittent streams, springs and dry washes.

- **Archaeological** – The Lindenmeier Site, a registered National Historic Landmark, is one of the most important early man sites in North America. Many other sites of cultural importance have been discovered, as well.

### **Why did the City's Natural Areas Program Purchase Soapstone Prairie Natural Area?**

- The Building Community Choices and the Open Space Yes! citizen sales tax initiatives direct the City to pursue "regional" land conservation. Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is in an area identified by City Council in April 2003 as a high priority land conservation focus area.
- Public input gathered in 2003 supported protecting regional natural areas, including the area where Soapstone Prairie is located.
- Conservation of the Soapstone Prairie property was a "once-ever" opportunity. It may have been either impossible or too costly to have conserved it in the future.
- Soapstone Prairie will provide outstanding recreation opportunities on a large scale. While our wonderful local natural areas currently provide over 25 miles of soft trails, as Fort Collins doubles in population over the next 20 to 30 years, regional natural areas such as Soapstone will help meet the community's growing recreation needs.
- Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is an essential piece of the Laramie Foothills/ Mountains-t-Plains Project. This joint effort by the City of Fort Collins, Larimer County, The Nature Conservancy, Legacy Land Trust and other private partners will conserve a large working landscape and wildlife corridor.
- Funds used to purchase the property also served as match money for a grant from GOCO for the Laramie Foothills - Mountains to Plains Project. Larimer County Open Lands received an \$11.6 Million Dollar GOCO Grant in December 2004 on behalf of the Mountains to Plains Project partnership. The original \$7.3 million spent on Soapstone was leveraged to conserve more than 50,000 acres in the Laramie Foothills area.

### **Operational Costs:**

- Start-up costs included improvements to provide recreation on the property: access roads, interior roads, parking lots, shelters, trails, restroom facilities, etc.
- Annual costs for operations and maintenance of Soapstone Prairie are approximately \$500,000.
- All funds for operations and maintenance come from dedicated sales tax funds.

*The mission of the City of Fort Collins' Natural Areas Program is to protect and enhance lands with existing or potential natural areas values, lands that serve as community separators, agricultural lands, and lands with scenic values. Protection of natural habitats and features is the highest priority, while providing for education and passive recreation for the Fort Collins community.*



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