



The Laramie Foothills: Mountains to Plains Project Timeline

Or... how the many planets aligned to make this project happen

- Early 1980's - The Nature Conservancy (TNC) recognizes the importance of the conservation of this area and coins the term "Laramie Foothills."
- 1987 – The Nature Conservancy formalizes its investment in conserving this landscape by completing its first capital campaign and purchasing what becomes known as Phantom Canyon Preserve. The preserve opens for stewardship and education programs in 1989.
- The Nature Conservancy builds a community-based conservation program developing partnerships and cooperative projects with private property owners, public land management agencies, non-profit and for profit organizations and local, state, and federal governments including ranchers, Larimer County, Legacy Land Trust and the Fort Collins.
- 1992 – Fort Collins voters pass a citizen initiated ¼ cent sales tax to fund the City's Natural Areas Program.
- 1993 – Larimer County adopted their first Parks Master Plan and that plan identified the heart of the Laramie foothills as a priority.
- 1995 – Larimer County voters overwhelmingly pass a citizen initiated "Help Preserve Open Spaces" ¼ cent county-wide sales and use tax to fund the County's Open Lands Program, 55% of which is shared with each of the eight incorporated cities and towns in the county.
- 1997 – Fort Collins citizens pass the Building Community Choices ¼ cent sales tax to continue the funding of the City's Natural Areas Program. Ballot language called for regional land conservation.
- 1999 – Larimer County citizens overwhelmingly vote to extend the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales and use tax for 15 years until 2018, and to also give the County bonding authority for future revenues up to \$54 million.
- 1999 property owners in the Buckeye area began a "citizen-initiated" conservation effort, as a way to protect their rural/ranching lifestyle and landscape. Since 1999, they have worked with the Legacy Land Trust and Larimer County Open Lands to protect 949 acres. Another 496 acres has been identified for protection, and contracts have been signed between three owners and Larimer County to grant these conservation easements in September 2009.
- January 2001 – Larimer County purchases Eagle's Nest Open Space, 755 acres in the Laramie Foothills.
- 2001 – Larimer County adopts an Open Lands Master Plan which expands upon the Laramie Foothills as a high priority area for conservation.
- 2002 – Fort Collins citizens pass the citizen initiated Open Space Yes! ¼ cent sales tax to continue funding the City's Natural Areas Program to 2030. Ballot language called for regional land conservation.
- By 2003 - TNC and numerous conservation partners and community members have collectively conserved almost 15,000 acres in the Laramie Foothills forever.
- 2003 – Jerry McMorris decides to sell the Red Mountain Ranch.

- 2003 – City of Cheyenne purchases 17,000 acres of the Belvoir Ranch in Wyoming (previously owned by Jerry McMorris). This purchase will forge the beginning of an Open Space Program in Laramie and Albany Counties.
- December, 2003 – GOCO begins discussions at their board meeting in Fort Collins regarding funding of large scale projects through citizen approved bonding or through existing fund balance. Kathay Rennels, Larimer County Commissioner introduces the Laramie Foothills: Mountains to Plains project to the GOCO Board and distributes a brochure establishing this project as a large scale project that is ready to go.
- 2003 – The twenty members of the Soapstone Grazing Association decide to sell the Colorado portion of the Soapstone Ranch which they have owned for over 40 years.
- 2002-2004 – Fort Collins develops and adopts the Land Conservation and Stewardship Master Plan which designates the Laramie Foothills as a high priority area for conservation.
- 2004 – Catherine Roberts sells a conservation easement on 4,557 acres of the approximately 16,600-acre Roberts Ranch after many years of discussion and planning with The Nature Conservancy. TNC partners on the purchase of the conservation easement were the Fort Collins, Larimer County and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO).
- May 2004 – Fort Collins purchases the Colorado portion of the Soapstone Ranch property, now known as Soapstone Prairie Natural Area.
- June 2004 – The GOCO Board approves allocating \$60 million towards for large scale projects of statewide significance.
- July 2004 – Fort Collins City Council approves the sale of Certificates of Participation, which provide the Natural Areas Program \$15 million for land conservation, which will be paid back over 15 years.
- August 2004 – Larimer County in partnership with the Fort Collins, The Nature Conservancy and Legacy Land Trust submits an application to GOCO requesting \$11.6 million for the Laramie Foothills: Mountains to Plains Project. With a local match of 13.7 million, the partnership will protect over 55,000 acres of land at an average cost of \$425 per acre.
- September 2004 – Larimer County, using funds from a Farm and Ranchland Protection grant, purchases an easement on over 550 acres of the Ackerman property as part of the Mountains to Plains Project.
- September 2004 – Fort Collins acquires a 640-acre in-holding in the Soapstone Prairie and 1,220 acres adjacent to the south boundary from Keith and Myrna Roman.
- September, 2004 – The partnership takes the GOCO Board and staff on a helicopter and driving tour of the Mountains to Plains project.
- October, 2004 - The partnership makes their case in a presentation to the full GOCO Board.
- November 2004 – Fort Collins leases 3,866 acres of in-holdings in the Soapstone Prairie from the State Land Board.
- December 1, 2004 – GOCO recognizes the great opportunity and approves the full grant request of \$11.6 million – one of the largest GOCO grants ever awarded.

- December 30, 2004 – Larimer County and The Nature Conservancy close on the remaining 15,000 acres of the Red Mountain Ranch, the most urgent element and the centerpiece of the Mountains to Plains project, spending \$7.8 of the \$11.6 million GOCO dollars awarded to the project
- January 2005 – Fort Collins acquires 316 acres from the Krafcziks for right-of-way for the extension of County Road 15 to provide public access to Soapstone Prairie.
- 2005 – Legacy Land Trust places conservation easement on 136 acres of Stonewall Creek in partnership with Larimer County and Fort Collins.
- 2006 – Catherine Roberts places a conservation easement on the remaining 12,000 acres of the Roberts Ranch.
- 2006–2008 - Fort Collins acquires the 1,360 acre Round Butte Ranch. GOCO Grants Phase I and II used to place a conservation easement on all 1,360 acres; the CE is held by Larimer County.
- 2006 – Fort Collins enters into a purchase agreement to purchase 1,760 acres of the Bernard Ranch over time; they closed upon all 1,760 acres by March 2009.
- 2006 – Fort Collins acquires the 3,873 acres of Soapstone in holdings owned by the State Land Board.
- 2007 – Fort Collins acquires 50 acres of the Wire Draw Ranch for access road right of way.
- 2007 – Larimer County in partnership with the Fort Collins purchases one of the last two in holdings within Red Mountain Open Space – the 1,480-acre Gallegos Ranch, which will be the location of the future trailhead and public access.
- 2008 – Fort Collins acquires a conservation easement on the 1,150 acre Wire Draw Ranch
- 2005-2007 – Fort Collins and Larimer County work together on Management Plans for SPNA and RMOS. Work includes formation of a technical advisory group; gathering public input via meetings and site tours; archeological surveys; vegetation and wildlife surveys by Colorado Natural Heritage Program, USFS, and staff; bird surveys by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Audubon, and staff; and City Council and County Commissioner review.
- 2008 – GOCO offers a one time trails grant. Fort Collins and Larimer County submit a joint application and are awarded \$550,000 to fund trails and trail head improvements on SPNA and RMOS.
- 2007-2009 Fort Collins designs and constructs: 9.5 miles of access road, two parking lots, three picnic shelters, the Lindenmeier Site overlook and accessible trail, two vault toilets, three kiosks, an entrance station, interpretive signs and brochures, and 42 miles of trails.
- 2008-2009 Larimer County designs and constructs: 2.5 miles of access road, a vehicle and horse trailer parking lot, a vault toilet, 2 picnic shelters, an outdoor classroom, kiosks, interpretive signs and brochures, and 8 miles of trails.
- **June 2009 – Grand Opening of Soapstone Prairie Natural Area and Red Mountain Open Space**
- **Over 56,000 acres of land conserved by the Laramie Foothills - Mountains to Plains Partnership to date!**
- 2010 – Larimer County constructs final 4 miles of trails.