

## CHAPTER FOUR - OPEN SPACE PLAN

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Open Space Plan is an element of the Durango Parks, Open Space, Trails and Recreation Master Plan. It describes the vision, structure, policies, priorities, strategies, and actions that are needed for the City to preserve and protect valued open spaces/natural lands throughout the community.

One of the goals of the Plan is to define the major elements and programmatic objectives for the City of Durango Open Space Program. To accomplish this, the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the 2001 City of Durango Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan have been utilized as the foundation for the new Plan. It updates, expands, modernizes and more thoroughly articulates the 2001 Open Space Master Plan in order to give Durango the additional tools necessary to effectively expand upon its efforts to preserve, and provide stewardship to, the City's open space and natural lands. The adopted 2007 City of Durango Comprehensive Plan also serves to guide the work of this Plan, in particular Chapter 2: Vision, Chapter 4: Natural Environment Element, and Chapter 10: Parks Recreation, Open Space and Trails Element.

***“Durango is an authentic and diverse community living in harmony with its natural environment, pursuing economic, environmental and social sustainability.”***

**City of Durango Vision: 2007 Comprehensive Plan**



#### 4.1.1 OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

Durango has an excellent system of open space. This in part due to the City's geographic setting in southwest Colorado where significant State and Federal lands surround Durango. With approximately 60 percent of La Plata County in public ownership, the preservation of additional lands for open space needs to be qualified based on the uniqueness of the land to be preserved rather than on the basic pursuit of setting aside lands for public purposes.

As with many Southwestern Colorado communities, many of the unique landscapes not yet preserved around Durango will continue to be under threat from future development. This is due in large part to the success that Durango enjoys as a "livable" community. While the economic downturn of the late 2000's has slowed growth, the notoriety of Durango's lifestyle will continue to attract new residents over time. An ever expanding population needs housing, roads, schools, workplaces, retail and related service areas. This future growth will have tremendous impact on open space around the community. The City needs to prioritize the unique landscapes and resources it desires to protect and utilize an expanded conservation "toolbox" to protect these resources.

The highest quality open space landscapes in the Durango planning area include the Animas River corridor which includes the popular Animas River Greenway and Trail through the City; the scenic mountain backdrops, which are, in large part, preserved and protected with just a few exceptions; and several large in-holdings of undeveloped land including Horse Gulch, lands adjacent to the Twin Buttes, and several large meadows immediately north of town in the Animas Valley including the former Kroeger Ranch.

The preservation of viewsheds, habitat, Animas River watershed, and passive recreational lands are core tenets of the City's Comprehensive Plan. Significant resources and policy directives have been focused on protecting these tenets. Preservation efforts have included significant acreage along the City's western backdrop/viewshed including Overend Mountain Park, Dalla Mountain Park, and other acreage in the area. These efforts have included land purchases, open space dedications both private and public, and various land use regulations including density limitations, setback requirements, and other viewshed restrictions.

Since 1994, the City of Durango has protected in excess of 1,575 acres of land including 1,510 acres of open space and greenway lands around the community. Of this 1,575 acre total, 406 acres were dedicated through the land use planning process or land donations, the remaining 1,169 acres were purchased. **Figure 2** provides a 15-year historical perspective of lands preserved.

No.	Year Acquired	Property	Acreage	Preservation Cost	Animas River Greenway
1	1994/1995	Overend Mountain Park	269.70	\$400,000	
2	1997	Cundiff Park**	17.65	\$600,000	Yes
3	1996	Dallabetta Park**	4.12	Donation	Yes
4	1997	Horse Gulch Reservoir Site	160.00	\$282,221	
5	1998	Walmart	15.00	Dedication	Yes
6	1999	Peregrine Creek Addition	28.13	Dedication	
7	2000	Smelter/Tailings**	79.14	Dedication	Yes
8	2000	Hanks	2.45	\$166,110	
9	2001	SkyRidge	183.85	Dedication	
10	2001	Birket	15.56	\$500,000	
11	2001	Elks	7.00	\$206,037	
12	2002	Hawk's Nest	6.10	Dedication	
13	2002	Escalante Crossing	13.30	Dedication	Yes
14	2002	Bennett	0.34	\$170,158	Yes
15	2003	Vet Clinic/Harley	2.30	Dedication	Yes
16	2003	Mercy Housing/Raider Ridge	14.12	Dedication	
17	2003	RiverGate	4.00	Dedication	Yes
18	2004	Hamilton	2.38	\$15,000	
19	2004	La Plata County	2.27	Dedication	Yes
20	2005	Dalla Mountain Park	177.80	\$4,581,570	
21	2005	Neal (Dallabetta Park Site)**	3.74	\$163,768	Yes
22	2006	Gardella	66.00	\$130,144	Yes
23	2006	Three Springs S. Open Space	34.78	Dedication	
24	2006	Three Springs Confluence Park**	15.28	Dedication	
25	2007	Ella Vita Canyon	3.78	Dedication	
26	2008	Rea	5.18	\$602,178	Yes
27	2008	La Plata Open Space	1.03	\$25,179	
28	2009	First Presbyterian Church (1/3)	240.00	\$413,852	
29	2009	FLC Foundation 240 (1/3)	0.00	\$440,252	
30	2009	Cliff Rock	200.00	\$1,003,939	
<b>Total Preservation Cost</b>			<b>1575.00</b>	<b>\$9,700,408</b>	
<b>Park Land</b>			<b>64.39</b>	<b>Acres</b>	
<b>General Open Space Preserved</b>			<b>1510.61</b>	<b>Acres</b>	
<b>Animas River Greenway Preserved</b>			<b>213.04</b>	<b>Acres</b>	
<b>Total Acres Preserved</b>			<b>1575.00</b>	<b>Acres</b>	
** Cundiff Park, Dallabetta Park, Neal property, Off Leash Area and Three Springs Confluence Park included in park acreages (total of 64.39 acres in parks)					

Figure 2 - Land Preservation Efforts 1994 through 2009

The City has received \$3,358,500 in grant funding from Great Outdoors Colorado to assist with preservation of this acreage

In addition to the lands identified in **Figure 2**, numerous City and County-owned parcels are located throughout the community that serve as open space for the neighborhoods but may not be designated as such. An evaluation of these parcels and their history should be undertaken. **Figure 3** below shows Durango Area Public Lands as of December 2009.

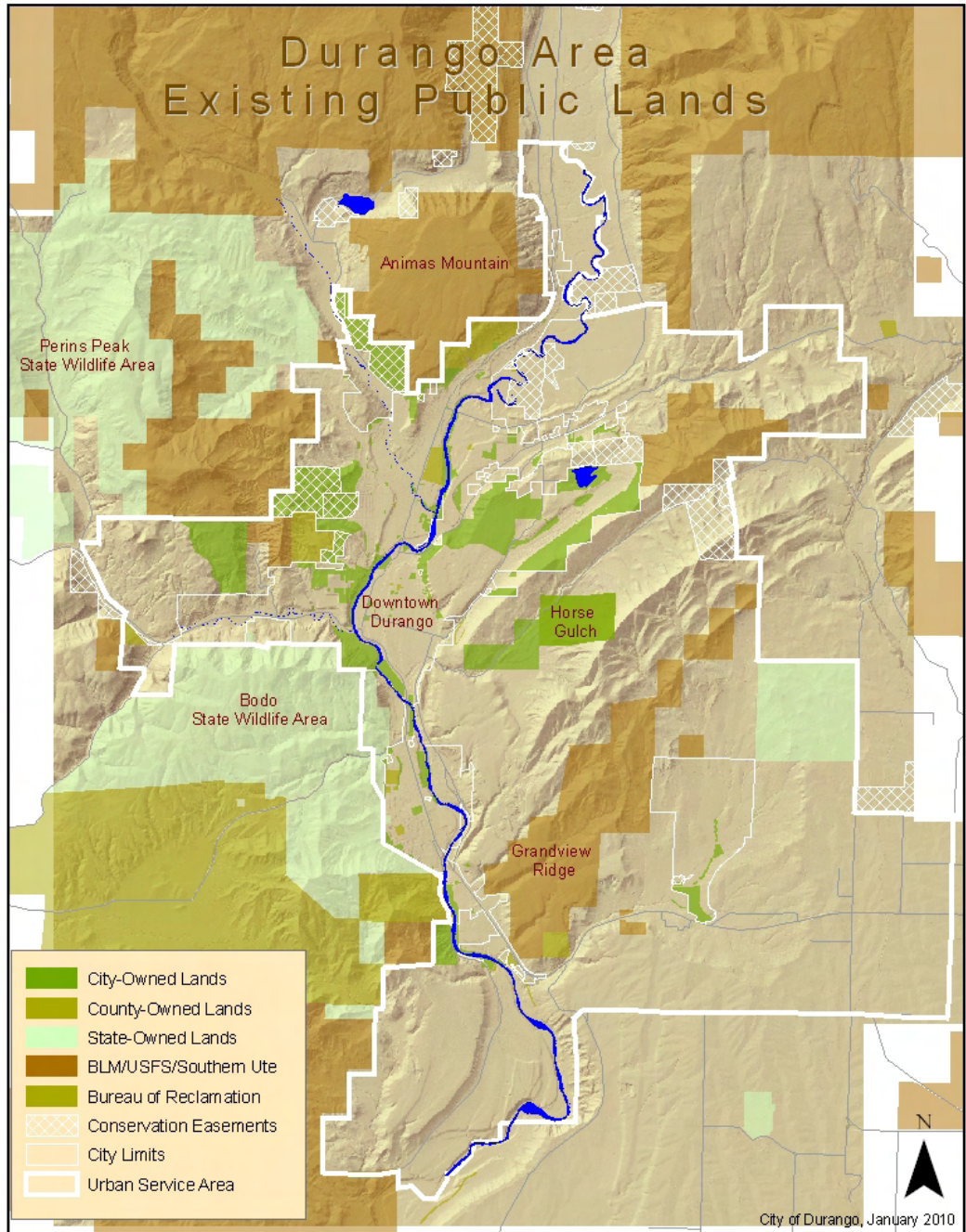
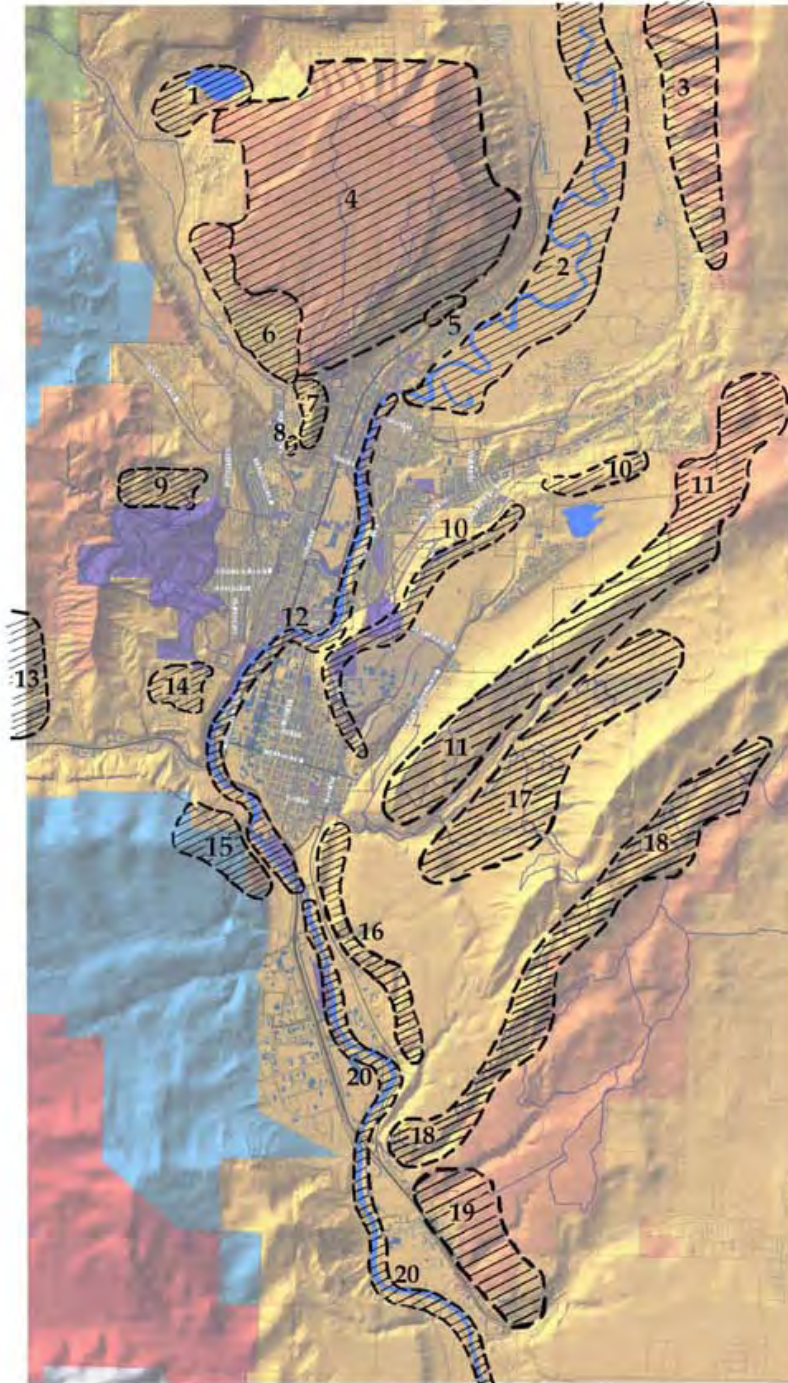


Figure 3 - Durango Area Public Lands as of December 2009

4.1.2 ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

The 2001 Open Space Master Plan mapped twenty (20) "Preservation Areas".



POTENTIAL OPEN SPACE

Figure 4 - 2001 Potential Open Space

The following is a 2009 update on the preservation areas shown in **Figure 4**:

- **Turtle Lake** – also known as Chapman Lake, this scenic lake and open meadow is perched in a small valley northwest of Animas Mountain and several miles outside the Durango City limits. Shortly after adoption of the 2001 Master Plan, land surrounding the lake was subdivided for large lot residential development.
- **Upper Animas River Greenway** – north of Durango the Animas River meanders through a broad meadow that includes the Kroeger Ranch and several other large parcels. This pastoral setting is a significant part of the “gateway” experience of entering and leaving Durango from the north. Since adoption of the 2001 Master Plan, several parcels in this corridor have been placed under conservation easement by the La Plata Open Space Conservancy. In the late 1990s, the City initiated efforts to preserve the Kroeger Ranch. Ultimately, the property was not preserved and a 64 lot subdivision was approved by La Plata County. Floodplain located within the approved subdivision was deed restricted as private open space. As of 2009, no development had occurred on the site.
- **Missionary Ridge** – a prominent escarpment along the east side of the north Animas Valley. Most of the upper part of this formation is in BLM and USFS ownership. The privately owned ridge top located above this escarpment was not included in the 2001 Master Plan and was ultimately subdivided for large lot development.
- **Animas Mountain** – the mountain top is under federal ownership with an assortment of public and private ownership occurring on the mountain slopes. The Mountain is a key backdrop and a recreational destination. The next three parcels make up portions of Animas Mountain.
- **X-rock** – a distinct rock formation with “X” fractures that is visible from Highway 550 at the north end of town. The X-rock itself is under County ownership. In 2000 the City acquired the 2.45 acre Hanks parcel, preserving access and parking for X-Rock.
- **Jacob’s Cliffs** – In 2005, the City acquired this 177.8 acre property located on the western slope of Animas Mountain, renaming it Dalla Mountain Park.
- **Tanque Verde** – a prominent ridge extending south from Animas Mountain with a green water tank (‘Tanque Verde’) at its southern end. In 2001 the City acquired the 15.56 acre Birket parcel on the western slope of this ridge, and in 2004 acquired the 2.38 acre Hamilton parcel on the ridge top. As of 2009, the east-facing slope between the water tank and Animas Mountain was undeveloped and under private ownership. While it has previously been evaluated for acquisition no preservation project has occurred due to other preservation priorities and the property’s limited development potential. The portion of the ridge immediately south of the tank was subdivided in 2007 allowing one homesite at the southwestern edge of the ridge top. As of 2009 no home has been built.
- **Bodine** – in the south end of the Junction Creek Valley off 25th Street. Preservation of this parcel was evaluated. Ultimately, due to the high value of the property, no preservation project occurred and it was acquired by a developer who subdivided it into a multi-lot subdivision.

- **Valentine Property** – north of Overend Mountain Park below Perins Peak. Preservation of this parcel was evaluated. Ultimately, due to the high value of the property, no preservation project occurred. It was subsequently subdivided into a 3 lot subdivision. The development approval process deed restricted the property to minimize impact on viewsheds, habitat, and stormwater runoff. Trail easements through the property to the adjacent Overend Mountain Park were established.
- **College Mesa** – the escarpment that forms the prominent backdrop for the east side of Durango. Much of this escarpment is already owned by the City or by Fort Lewis College, and is not developable. Further east on this ridgeline, several pre-existing residential lots sit at the rim of the mesa.
- **Raider Ridge** – a ridgetop paralleling Goeglein Gulch Road and Jenkins Ranch Road. The City acquired approximately 160 acres on Raider Ridge through a dedication by the SkyRidge Subdivision in 2001. Further south along the ridge the City preserved 14.12 acres in 2003 through a developer dedication as part of the Mercy affordable housing development on Goeglein Gulch Road. The City has set the stage for additional dedications of Raider Ridge property along Goeglein Gulch Road as properties are considered for annexation and development. The City also continues to evaluate opportunities to preserve four privately owned 40 acre parcels located across the top of Raider Ridge that, if acquired, would connect existing City and FLC property with the BLM land to the northeast. In mid-2009 a trail easement was acquired to connect the city-owned ridge top with the BLM land to the northeast.
- **Central Animas River Greenway** – as it passes through the central part of the city between 32nd Street to the north and Santa Rita Drive to the south. Most of this has been preserved. In 2008, the City acquired the 5.18 acre parcel formerly owned by the Rae family. There are several exceptions where long-established development continues to function. It is the City's intention to continue to monitor these properties and work with property owners during future redevelopment to ensure preservation of river frontage/riparian shoreline and trail corridor access.
- **South Perins Peak/Twin Buttes** – a broad, sloping, highly visible hillside on the north side of Highway US 160 west of Durango. The City continues to evaluate opportunities for the preservation of the South Perins Peak/Twin Buttes properties. In 2009, the City acquired the 200 acre Cliff Rock property. The Twin Buttes development will also dedicate the upper reaches of the property as public open space.
- **Durango Mountain Park/Landfill** – a visible former landfill site that is adjacent to the Overend (formerly Durango) Mountain Park and surrounded on all sides by undeveloped land. This property is under ownership of La Plata County. The closed landfill is being actively managed and monitored by La Plata County. The balance of the property is in a natural state and functions as a part of the open space and trails associated with the Overend Mountain Park and other adjacent publicly-owned lands.
- **DOW Smelter Mountain Tract** – the mountain and foothill setting on the west side of US Highway 160 as it enters Durango from the south and swings west along

Lightner Creek; a part of the DOW's Bodo Wildlife Area. This property is preserved under the public ownership of CDOW and the City of Durango. A portion of the site is used by the community as a designated off-leash dog area.

- **Ewing Mesa** – the prominent escarpment that forms the ridgeline backdrop on the east side of Highway US 160 upon entering or leaving Durango to the south. The City continues to evaluate opportunities for the preservation of the various Ewing Mesa properties including ridgelines along the mesa top.
- **Horse Gulch** – a large in-holding east of Raider Ridge adjacent to Grandview Ridge BLM property that is owned by an assortment of public and private entities including Fort Lewis College, the City of Durango, La Plata County and Oakridge Energy. Horse Gulch is a primary Durango destination for mountain biking, hiking and jogging. As of early 2010, the City was owner of approximately 394 acres and part owner of an additional 240 acres. The City is in negotiation or under contract to acquire an additional 481 acres and continues to evaluate other preservation opportunities.
- **Carbon Junction Canyon** – a relatively undisturbed corridor that contains an attractive setting for hiking, mountain biking and wildlife movement. This property is part of the 1,200 acre Grandview Ridge which is under ownership of the BLM and preserved and managed for a variety of uses including resource extraction, habitat and non-motorized recreation.
- **Grandview Ridge** – this area sits to the south of the Carbon Junction area and is part of the larger 1,200 acres managed by the BLM.
- **Lower Animas River Greenway** – as the Animas River flows south, from Santa Rita Park to beyond the Escalante Middle School, there are a number of private parcels that have direct riverfront access as well as floodplain. The City has acquired several key parcels within the Lower Animas River Greenway including :1) the 17.65 acre Cundiff Park site in 1997; 2) the 15 acre Walmart parcel in 1998; 3) the 13.3 acre Escalante Crossings parcel in 2002 ;4) the 4 acre Rivergate parcel in 2003; 5) the 2.3 acre Vet/Harley parcel in 2003; 6) the 2.27 acre La Plata County parcel in 2004; 7) the 3.74 acre Neal/Dallabetta parcel in 2005; and 8) the 66 acre Gardella parcel in 2006. The City has also secured easements for the Animas River Trail through several properties along the river in this corridor that preserve public access to, and along the river's edge. With only a few exceptions, the entire Lower Greenway has been preserved through public ownership or development regulation. The City continues to evaluate the remaining opportunities for the preservation within the Lower Greenway.

As depicted earlier in this Plan, efforts occurring between 1994 and 2009 have resulted in the preservation of 1,575 acres in and around the City of Durango.