

4.2 FUNCTIONS OF OPEN SPACE

Open space provides a number of broad functional qualities to a community. It is not just scenic land to view and enjoy as recreational space. Open space is “*natural and green infrastructure*” that provides a number of important functions and benefits for Durango. Different types of open spaces in and around Durango provide benefits depending on the nature of the open space, location and other factors.

Key functions and benefits include:

- **Community Identity and Character**—shapes and defines urban form including relief from urban development, separation of large urban expanses and creating a sense of readily accessible (or viewable) open space from residences and businesses.
- **Special Landscape Preservation**—protects unique and irreplaceable landscapes, geological formations, cultural resources and sacred places.
- **View Preservation**—primarily to protect Durango’s scenic mountain backdrop, but also views from the mountains to the Animas River Valley.
- **Biodiversity and Habitat**—conserves diverse and healthy biological systems for both flora and fauna.
- **Health and Wellness**—offers accessible places that promote and facilitate passive recreational uses such as hiking, biking, and jogging.
- **Access and Linkage**—provides residents access to open spaces and open space networks. Links open spaces together into contiguous functioning networks and systems.
- **Vital Urban Resource Protection**—includes maintaining water supplies, preserving water quality, filtration of stormwater and enhancing air quality. These may also include corridors for drainageways and utility rights-of-way as well as attenuating noise along highways.
- **Public Safety and Hazard Reduction**—reduces risk to life and property associated with lands prone to floods, landslides, and fires or other constraints such as steep slopes, unsuitable soils, and wetlands that make lands unsuitable for urban development for public safety or health reasons.
- **Solace and Link to Nature**—provides accessible places for relaxation, contemplation and quiet. (Studies show that both physical and mental health improve where urban dwellers have access to “green spaces” and natural areas.)
- **Economic Value**— provides economic benefits as a result of preservation including tourism, property value protection and enhancement and attracting business and industry.
- **Agricultural Lands Preservation**—protects existing and potential future agricultural resources including working crop and ranch lands.

In addition to these functional qualities of open space, it is also important and necessary to define a vocabulary of open space lands that tie the definition and functional qualities of open space to the lands and resources of Durango.

4.3 VOCABULARY OF OPEN SPACE IN DURANGO

Durango's open space can be further described in open space subcategories that link resources to the physiographic landscapes of Durango. The City of Durango is located in the Southern Rockies, Lower San Juan Range physiographic region of the United States and the area landscape is comprised of the following key elements.

4.3.1 SCENIC MOUNTAIN BACKDROP AND VIEWSCAPE

The scenic mountain backdrop is the largest viewscape and most significant open space landscape for Durango and includes the mountainsides and ridgelines as viewed from downtown, from College Mesa, from roadways and other landscapes. This backdrop is owned and managed by various entities, including the federal, state and local governments and private individuals. Most importantly, these lands form the very distinct and beautiful, and in a few remaining instances vulnerable, backdrop for the City.

Key landscapes within this category include Durango and Dalla Mountain Parks, the La Plata Mountains, Perins Peak, Twin Buttes, Animas Mountain, Smelter Mountain, Raider Ridge, Ewing Mesa Ridgeline, Grandview Ridge, and Missionary Ridge.



4.3.2 RIVERS, STREAMS AND LAKES

Rivers, streams and lakes are key components of the health and viability of Durango. The centerpiece of this category is the Animas River and its tributaries. Protecting the Animas and its tributaries will help to assure supplies of clean water, healthy fisheries, quality paddling opportunities, and other outdoor recreational benefits. In addition, protecting stream corridors and their associated floodplains helps both to protect the region's wildlife and to reduce the hazards of flooding and erosion. Stream corridors also lend themselves to the creation of greenways. Objectives of greenways include preservation of wildlife habitat and routes for wildlife circulation; protection of water, air, and scenic qualities; control of flooding; protection of historic and cultural values; and creation of trail corridors and greenspace within the built environment.

Key landscapes within this category include the Animas River corridor, Junction Creek, Lightner Creek, Wilson Gulch. While located outside the City's planning area, other example landscapes within this category include Lake Nighthorse, Chapman Lake, Stevens Creek, Florida River, and La Plata River.



4.3.3 MEADOWS AND MESAS

Subalpine and montane grasslands, meadows and mesas occur on many of the high plateaus and isolated mountain ranges in Southern Colorado. These meadows and mesas commonly form on flat areas with poorly-drained soils or on high, often east or south-facing, windswept ridges. There is commonly an abrupt transition between surrounding forests and these grasslands, producing an “edge effect” of high biological productivity. These meadows and mesas are important to many species, including several large and small mammals, among them elk, deer, pronghorn, gophers, and voles, as well as numerous birds, including wild turkey and western bluebird.

Key landscapes within this category include Horse Gulch, Florida Mesa, and the Animas River Valley.



4.3.4 STEEP SLOPE AND HAZARDOUS LANDSCAPES

These are areas that should be protected for the chief reason of reducing endangerment to human life and environmental degradation. These are areas that have steep slopes; could have soils prone to erosion; slopes that could be subject to bank failure; or areas with high fire potential. Protecting high hazard landscapes is a critically important function of Open Space programs, and should be considered important to Durango as well. Land use regulation is a primary tool for preserving these types of landscapes.

Key landscapes within this category include: the eastern slope of Animas Mountain, western slope of Raider Ridge, northern slope of Smelter Mountain, the Twin Buttes, and eastern slope of Perins Peak.



4.3.5 URBAN INTERFACE WILDLANDS

These are close-in parcels readily accessible from neighborhoods and in some instances overlap other categories presented. These areas may serve as buffers that separate the highly developed edge of town from large, minimally disturbed federal or State lands. These areas are easily accessible for residents and offer close-to-home opportunities for unstructured, passive recreation in a natural setting.

Key landscapes within this category include the Overend and Dalla Mountain Parks, lands along the Animas River, Raider Ridge, Horse Gulch, the Twin Buttes area, and other, smaller, undeveloped parcels that dot the edge of the community.



4.3.6 HERITAGE AND WORKING LANDS

These are special landscapes that embody the historic and unique character of Durango, especially the north Animas Valley open meadows. Subcomponents of this landscape include grazing livestock, prime agricultural farmland, historic buildings, barns and other architectural elements that recall the historic occupation of the southwest. Heritage landscapes also may include unique geological features such as rock formations and monuments.

The primary landscapes in this category include the Animas Valley both north and south of town. Other example include lands along the primary highway corridors entering Durango from the east and west including Florida Mesa and the lower reaches of the Twin Buttes area.

