

Open Space, Trails & Wildlife

Open Space

Policy Statement:

The term “Open Space” describes land that is specifically restricted from further development by deed or conservation easement. We support the preservation of open space and the sense of keeping lands and views clear and unobstructed. Our goal is to help create more Open Space, public and private, deed-restricted and functionally constrained, as a way of mitigating the impacts of development. We intend to add to the total conservation acreage in Woody Creek.

We want to preserve and enhance wildlife habitats, open space, trails, parks, and agricultural uses. We do not encourage activities that interfere with traditional wildlife corridors. We do not perceive the trend of turning Open Space into linear public parks and increasing areas of human recreation as beneficial to the environment. We encourage the debate of the preservation of the environment versus public access so the decisions will be made with clear eyes and the results well understood.

Zone Designations in Woody Creek:

- **Rural Residential:** Rural Residential land is non-irrigated land, which is located outside of critical wildlife winter range and migration corridors. Very low density residential development is acceptable in this zone.
- **Agricultural/Wildlife Reserve-AWR:** The Principal Land Use Objective of the Pitkin County land use code since the Down Valley Plan of 1987 is to identify the highest priority land for preservation and recommend suitable locations for development. The plan established approximately 31,000 acres, or 40% of land down valley, as part of the Agricultural/Wildlife Reserve. Residential development is strongly discouraged on AWR lands.
- **Rural and Remote:** This zoning district was adopted by the BOCC in 1994. The intent of Rural and Remote is to preserve the natural

environment and move development from the isolated back country to more appropriate areas. This zone district applies to areas of the County which are not served by utilities, year round road maintenance or emergency services. Typically, lands within this zone are subalpine and alpine and represent a unique environmental resource in the Community. These lands are often encumbered by a variety of natural hazard areas such as steep slopes, avalanche, and may be prone to wildfire. The Woody Creek Caucus has consistently supported this designation for land within Woody Creek.

- **Dedicated Open Space:** Open Space is one of Woody Creek's highest priorities. As demands on this limited asset compound it is very important that we are deliberate in its preservation and that we participate in responsible uses and management of the space. We recognize the contradiction between preservation of open space and increasing public access and we need to continue to work toward resolving this dilemma. Where there is a conflict our recommendation is to preserve the land and the expansion and creation of public recreational practices would be discouraged.

Concerns of the Community:

1. **Commercial Uses.** There is a growing concern regarding the increasing commercial use of public lands. While individual uses of these areas cause small impacts, commercial recreational uses cause significant impacts. A few kayakers going down the Roaring Fork cause little notice. Dozens of commercial rafts loaded with passengers on a daily basis cannot be ignored. Cross-country skiers in the winter backcountry do minimal harm. Commercial snowmobile operations in the National Forest have great impacts.
2. **Overdevelopment and conversely, the underuse of land that is suited for agricultural purposes.**

Recommendations:

1. **If there were a way to limit commercial uses in public areas, greater public access for individual use could be acceptable in specified areas. The County should have a special use permit for commercial recreational uses on public lands in Pitkin County including use of**

- public parking areas on publicly owned land in order to control use and damage to public access areas.
2. Conservation easements are mechanisms by which a landowner can contribute development rights from land but still maintain ownership and specific use of the land and receive benefits. We should seek to protect as many parcels of productive agricultural land from development as possible, including irrigated meadows, open croplands and historic ranching areas.
 3. Change the tax laws that penalize landowners for not developing their land. Developed residential lands are assessed at 10 percent of actual value by the Colorado state assessor's office and undeveloped lands are assessed at 29 percent of actual value. We would like to see undeveloped lands taxed at a lesser rate to encourage them to remain undeveloped.

Recreation and Trails

Policy Statement:

Trails are linear parks. As such, our own Rio Grande trail provides for miles of recreation throughout the valley. We encourage use of the Rio Grande Right of Way for non-motorized, non-commercial recreational uses. We have supported the recent completion of this trail with a soft surface as well as a paved surface as it makes it available for safe community pedestrian connections for walkers, joggers, skiers, bicyclists and equestrians.

Wilton Jaffee Sr. Park is the only public park in Woody Creek. It provides river access for fishermen and boaters. It is considered a passive park though for all practical purposes it serves mainly as a parking lot and staging area for commercial enterprises. In 1997, Trout Unlimited donated a log picnic table and benches, as well as planted nine clumps of aspen trees around the site to honor Chuck Fothergill.

Concerns of the Community:

1. Current overuse of River Road by non-motorized recreationalists creates extremely hazardous conditions.
2. We do not support unlimited access to sensitive lands.
3. Inappropriate use of designated parking areas and general parking violations.

4. **Recreational usage by people and dogs having negative impact on adjacent private properties.**
5. **Jaffee Park is used excessively by commercial businesses catering to kayakers, rafters, fishermen, etc. Illegal camping is a frequent occurrence.**

Recommendations:

1. **We want to encourage commuter and recreational traffic to keep to the trail.**
2. **Trails providing access to back country, wilderness and public lands should not be physically maintained, but the access should be retained.**
3. **Parking areas at trailheads and loading areas on the River need to be better defined. Land adjacent to these parking and loading areas needs to be protected through signage and physical barriers. Overnight parking should be restricted as they encourage uses other than trail access.**
4. **Trail users should create minimal impacts on private property. Dogs should be restrained from disturbing wildlife and ranch animals.**
5. **Jaffee Park is being over used by commercial enterprises. Overnight parking and illegal camping needs to be prevented. The park needs to be better designed and landscaped as a passive park. Enhancement of the riparian environment should be strongly encouraged. Parking needs to be limited with non-parking areas protected by barriers. Landscaping with the use of hardy native plants should be done. Commercial use impacts should be limited.**

Wildlife

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of Woody Creek to identify and protect habitat for the preservation of wildlife and prohibit land use patterns which disrupt such habitat, in agreement with PCLU Code 2-160. An abundance of wildlife is part and parcel of our rural character. This includes herds of deer and elk, which the Woody Creek Caucus is dedicated to preserving and protecting.

Riparian Areas & Wildlife Habitat:

Wide expanses of open space and long riparian stretches are significant parts of a Woody Creek ecosystem, a symbiotic relationship between flora and fauna providing for a home to a vast array of wildlife -- red fox and coyotes, deer and elk, eagle and owl, turkey, beaver, bear, raccoon, skunks, and many more.

The elk herds of Woody Creek are viewed with much awe and serve as more than just a symbol of a quality of life and are valuable environmental resources worthy of preservation. Many elk herds do exist in our region and one that resides primarily on McLain Flats has safely migrated and grazed throughout Woody Creek for over 75 years. The herds, numbering in the hundreds in 2015, include many young calves, cows and several bulls and is often seen crossing McLain Flats Road, feeding on many of the south-facing slopes and pastures. A single herd may range throughout the W/J and White Star ranchlands, migrating and grazing in the upper and lower regions and across to the Airport Ranch Open Space.

Of principal concern are these large animal migration routes, winter range and calving areas, including public and private lands. Established elk and deer migration corridors may conflict with development patterns. Case in point, the migration corridor has already been reduced to a fraction of its former size along Owl Creek Road.

Local experience has proven that there is more wildlife activity in areas where housing exists than is reflected on DOW maps. The above-mentioned herd of elk winters at the W/J ranch although the herd is not adequately represented on the DOW maps. These maps could be refined.

Riparian areas – the zones on banks and borders of natural waterways, are a part of the wilderness habitat that provides for a rich and varied balance of wildlife. A high concentration of wildlife species exist in riparian areas. The conflict in preservation of riparian areas versus access by the public and landscaping with non-native plants threaten the sustainability of a healthy environment for wildlife. It is the clear consensus of the Woody Creek Caucus that there are no measures taken which would decrease wildlife habitat in any way. It is our intention that wildlife habitat be increased whenever possible.

Concerns of the Community:

- 1. Increased speed and traffic along McLain Flats Road and River Road by motorists who use the road as merely a convenient route to bypass the busy Highway 82.**
- 2. Dogs running loose may threaten attack, maim, wear out, or even directly kill wildlife.**
- 3. Increasing presence of insensitive human activities in wildlife habitat, including increased traffic on roads, increase stress on animals and make habitat less viable.**

Recommendations:

- 1. Wildlife habitat and the ability for wildlife to move freely should be protected. Migration patterns of elk and deer depend on our maintaining targeted corridors. Conservation easements should be acquired wherever possible in Woody Creek to protect wildlife habitat.**
- 2. Native plant species should be maintained and habitat protected in its natural state.**
- 3. Springs, marshes, ponds and other watering areas shall be preserved.**
- 4. Protect vulnerable areas from further development and restrict development to areas with minimal wildlife impacts. Prohibit development from blocking any corridor and interfering with migration between summer and winter ranges.**
- 5. Smooth wire fencing shall replace any barbed wire fencing and none shall exceed 5 feet for the sake of the animals.**
- 6. Outdoor lighting shall be kept to a minimum.**