

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

Katie Donahue, Natural Areas Director
Julia Feder, Environmental Program Manager
Tawnya Ernst, Land Conservation Lead Specialist

SUBJECT

Resolution 2025-001 Authorizing the Mayor to Execute an Intergovernmental Agreement with Larimer County concerning the Livermore Conservation Project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to seek authorization to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Larimer County for the Livermore Conservation Project. The project will conserve four ranches totaling 4,897 acres within the Laramie Foothills/Mountains to Plains Priority Area. The County would be the lead on this project and hold the conservation easements on the properties.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the Resolution.

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

In 2022, Natural Areas partnered with Larimer County Open Lands to conserve 428 acres of the Quarter Circle Lazy H Ranch via conservation easement. The success of that transaction served as the catalyst for conservation of four other ranches. The ranches lie west of the intersection of County Road 74E (aka Red Feather Lakes Road) and Highway 287. The properties' ranch steads are quintessential of Colorado's agricultural heritage. Conservation of these properties supports Natural Areas Goal 1: Conserve & Protect Land and Water and the priorities noted in the 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan: Laramie Foothills Conservation Focus Area, as well as the 2019 Fort Collins City Plan Principle ENV 1: Conserve, preserve, protect, create, and enhance ecosystems and natural spaces with Fort Collins, the GMA, and the Region.

The properties contain diverse, intact, connected wildlife habitats: foothills grasslands, shrublands, montane forest, and riparian corridors. The Colorado Natural Heritage Program designates the ranches as having high biodiversity significance. The properties are part of an iconic 4-mile viewshed and serve as a buffer and connection between USFS lands, Cherokee Park State Wildlife Area – Lower Unit, State Land Board parcels, Larimer County's Eagle's Nest Open Space, and numerous conservation easements (CE). Approximately 1.5 miles of Lone Pine Creek run through one of the properties which includes a mature riparian system that supports critical habitat for the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse. The properties have been in the one ranching family for decades. The family runs sustainable livestock grazing and haying operations which will be further preserved by senior water rights tied to the conservation easements.

The total amount to acquire the conservation easements will be approximately \$15,000,000. The City will contribute \$3,000,000 to that total amount and will receive certain rights in exchange. The IGA and the conservation easements will provide that if the County ever seeks to assign its rights as holder of the conservation easements, the County must first offer those rights to the City. Additionally, the IGA and the conservation easements will provide that if any portion of the conservation easements are sold, exchanged, transferred or otherwise extinguished, or taken by eminent domain, the net proceeds from such disposition will be divided between the County and the City in the same proportion as their respective contributions to the initial purchase payments for acquiring the conservation easements. While the City will not be a signatory to the conservation easements and could not enforce these rights directly through the conservation easements, the City could enforce these rights under the IGA. Management staff of the Natural Areas Department is comfortable that the expenditure of these \$3,000,000 is a good investment and is confident that the City's interests will be protected in the long term.

CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS

The total cost to the County to acquire the conservation easements is estimated to be \$15,000,000 plus closing and due diligence costs.

- Natural Areas will contribute \$3,000,000 towards the acquisition of the four conservation easements.
- Great Outdoors Colorado is contributing \$2.5 million toward the transactions.

BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

At its December 11, 2024 meeting, the Land Conservation and Stewardship Board voted unanimously to recommend that City Council approve the IGA with Larimer County concerning the Livermore Conservation Project.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

None.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution for Consideration
2. Resolution Exhibit A.
3. Natural Areas Administrative Policy- Land Acquisition Partnership Guidelines
4. Land Conservation and Stewardship Board Minutes, December 11, 2024