

Master Plan Update

Palmer Lake Recreation Area - Centennial Park

The Recreation Hub of NW El Paso County



May - July 2023



Lake Recreation Area - Centennial Park

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1. History and Overview of Centennial Park Palmer Lake Recreation Area

The Palmer-Divide region contains a geological ridge that runs eastward from the Colorado Front Range. This ridge creates its own weather patterns and also separates the Arkansas River drainage to the south and the Platte River drainage to the North.

The highest point of the divide is about 7700' at Vollmer Hill which is located in Black Forest which is several miles east of Palmer Lake. The Town of Palmer Lake sits at the base of the Front Range at the western most end of the Palmer Divide at 7276'. Ben Lomand, stands at 7636' and overlooks the lake on the east side. This was named after the Ben Lomand located in Edinburgh, Scotland as many of the early settlers were of Scottish descent.

The Palmer-Divide was critical to the railroad since the late 1800's because the steam trains chugged up to the Palmer-Divide and had to take on water before heading back down to either Denver or Colorado Springs. The lake was the only natural water supply available on a year-round basis.

Passengers from Denver or Colorado Springs would take a day trip to Palmer Lake for a day of picnicking, fishing, boating or wildflower picking. This round trip fare cost \$1.50 and it was a great way to escape the heat in the cities.

Dr. William Finley Thompson, a dental surgeon born in Ohio and who had practiced in Omaha, Portland, San Francisco, and London, England, came to Colorado in 1882. He soon platted the Town of Palmer Lake, intending it as a health and vacation resort. The Rocky Mountain Chautauqua, a people's vacation university, was active from 1887 through 1910 in the Glen Park area just south of Town and the Lake.

Past Lake based industries included harvesting ice which continued until 1941, when moss and cinders from the RR contaminated the water and businesses that were supported by the railroad. The south end of the lake was created shallow to aid in the ice harvesting.

Figure 1: Ice harvesting at the Lake's south end
Photo: Courtesy Palmer Lake Historical Society



The Greenland Ranch (now Greenland Open Space) to our North once shipped more cattle to market than any other location in Colorado. The Goodnight-Loving cattle drive from Texas came through our area in 1866 and over the Palmer Divide. Indeed, the Greenland area was so named by Helen Hunt Jackson as the grass was so plentiful and green in color. Our

historical heritage is rich with the knowledge of our pioneer pathfinders who settled the land and left their mark for all to see and learn about.

The area around the two towns, Palmer Lake and Monument, remained largely as ranch and farmland until the Air Force Academy was opened in 1958. Most growth along this part of the I-25 corridor has occurred since 1990.

2. Beginnings of Palmer Lake Recreation Area - Centennial Park and the Lake

Palmer Lake has a long history with the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG). The first train entered Palmer Lake in 1872 along the west side of the Lake. In 1887, the railroad was granted first rights to Monument Creek water and constructed a reservoir in North Monument Creek canyon and had public rights to use water on the public land adjacent to the tracks. Pipes were installed in 1882 to supply water to the railroad's depot and lake. Due to shortages of water, a second reservoir, which is now called the Upper Reservoir was built in 1904-1905.

The present day Lake, the heart of the PL Recreation Area, went through several name changes. In 1869, it was identified as Summit Lake on a Holbrook map which was a surveying company from Kansas Pacific railroad. In April of 1883, it was called Loch Katrine, influenced by the influx of many Scottish immigrants. According to some people, it was also called Loch Lomond. The present day name, Palmer Lake, was recorded about 1884.

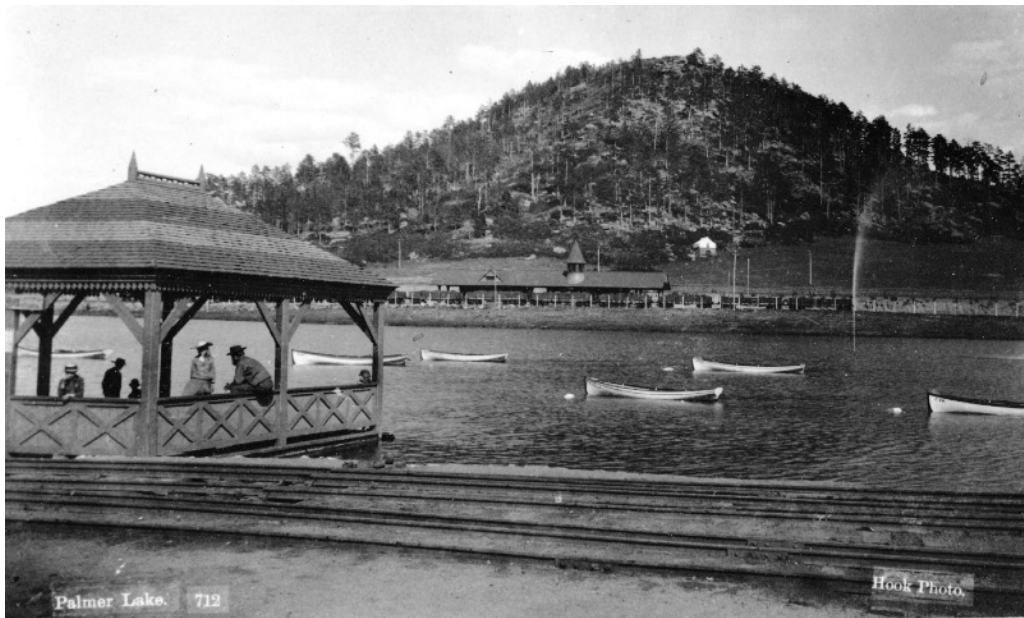
In the early 1880's it was decided to turn the Palmer Lake area adjacent to the railroad depot and tracks into a park. The lake was enlarged, the old depot and section house were torn down.

In June 1883, the railroad constructed a wooden bridge over the tracks at the south end of the lake. This bridge led to a spacious dancing pavilion and to picnic grounds to the south and east. This dance hall was later moved to Pine Crest in the Glen. There are still remains of the bridge near the parking lot adjacent to the baseball field.

The railroad built an artisan cistern that was perpetually filled by a spring. Pipes ran from this to the middle of the lake to create an 80' fountain. Over time the fountain was discontinued until 1989 when it was reinstalled. Another hiatus, the fountain was not installed for a few years until 1998. History oft repeats itself as the fountain again went dormant and then reinstalled after the Lake was refilled. It is now maintained and installed each spring, as the Lake water level allows, by the Parks and Trails Commission and Public Works Department.

The beauty of the future Centennial Park was marred when the Santa Fe railroad put in tracks on the east side of the Lake in 1887 to compete with the Denver and Rio Grande line. These lines were consolidated during WWI with northbound trains using Santa Fe tracks and southbound trains using D&RG line. Both of these lines can be seen in Photo 2.

Around 1940 the D&RG depot and Santa Fe station across the lake were demolished and the



viaducts at south end of lake were abandoned. In 1956 Palmer Lake leased the water rights from

Photo 2: Palmer Lake showing the fountain and depot
Courtesy of the Palmer Lake Historical Society

the D&RG railroad. In 1961, the section foreman's house was donated to the historical society and it was moved to its current location and currently houses the police department. In 1967 the Santa Fe depot was sold and moved to South Park. A big change occurred to the east side of the Recreational area when all trains were routed on the tracks west of the Lake, and the tracks on the east side were removed in 1973. In the early 1980s, the town bought the two reservoirs and lake from the D&RG railroad.

Photo 3: Canoeing in the Lake
Photo: Courtesy Palmer Lake Historical Society



3. Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission

The “Parks and Recreation Commission” was approved in 1983 and various sections were revised pertaining to The Commission over the years, 1991 and 1992. (Ordinance 12.20.010-12.20.100) The “Parks and Recreation Commission” was approved by the Board of Trustees (BOT) on 4/9/92 outlined the duties.

In the October 12, 2017, in the Board of Trustees Meeting, the formation of the Parks Advisory Group for Town Parks was discussed as a future agenda item. In January 2018, the Palmer Lake Board of Trustees heard a report on the formation of the volunteer Parks Committee and its beginning activities. The Parks Committee was charged with developing the master plan for Glen Park, policy reviews, possible programs, and facility needs for all Palmer Lake Parks. The current Palmer Lake parks are: Centennial (around Palmer Lake itself), Columbine Park (a small neighborhood park near the old Pine Crest site), Glen Park, and in 2023 hopefully a new park (to be named later) and trail system connected by a Creekside Trail extension into and around the old Elephant Rock / Salvation Army property site.

The Commission, then a committee, began meeting every two-weeks in March 2018. It was composed of two BOT members, and 7 community member/volunteers. The Committee began addressing all the needs of the various parks and programs for the parks, and how to raise funds for facilities/equipment and the maintenance of them, identify other sources for funds, and prioritize projects that would be the focus for the 2018 budget expenditures. The annual financial contribution of the Conservation Trust Fund allowed Parks to develop and upgrade parks around Town to a limited degree. The Committee didn't just establish the guidelines but also developed, organized, and ran various programs to achieve the tasks.

In May 2019 the Parks Committee submitted their first Department Report to Town administration (at their request) before the BOT meeting which summarized the first year of activities. The Committee didn't have a paid department head like fire, police, roads, and water departments. The duties of developing and presenting the monthly report is done by one of the Committee members. The May 9th 2019 (the Parks Committee's first) report outlined the 44 different activities, events, proposals, and meetings the Parks Committee had participated in or accomplished in its first year. Even more impressive is the number of volunteer hours performed by the Parks Committee, summer 2019: May – 155; June – 267; July – 71.5; August – 170.5. The Parks Committee developed agendas and took meeting minutes, and posted them on the Town website beginning that September.

The Committee became a Commission again in an update to Code section 12.20. 010-040 with its commissioners, appointed by the Board of Trustees, to staggered two year terms in 2020. This was a revision to previous language from 1982, 1983, 1991, and 1992.



The Palmer Lake Parks Commission became the Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission by BOT Amended and Adopted Code Section 2-20 in February 2023. This change added language that included “addition of trail maintenance and responsibilities” and “the creation of new trails and bridges.”

The Commission functions under the Public Works Department of the Town since 2022. The PL Parks and Trails Commission works to coordinate its efforts with local groups, most notably Awake Palmer Lake, who also has Centennial Park at the heart of their efforts, and El Paso County Parks. See a list of other entities that work with Palmer Lake Parks and Trails to improve our parks in Chapter 13.

4. Past and Recent Survey Findings

This document updates previous Comprehensive Plans, Streetscape, and Master Plans that included the area around the actual Lake, Palmer Lake Recreation Area - Centennial Park, and the lake itself. Those plans were developed and updated most recently in 1992, 1993-4, 2003, 2008, and 2013 - 15.

The 1992 Community survey for the Town of Palmer Lake Comprehensive Plan resulted in the following priorities for Park & Rec. Only 9 priorities out of 157 respondents:

1. Recreational fields - soccer
2. Maintain parks - more activities
3. More flowers

Response to the question “Would you like to see recreational programming expanded?” Yes

86 No 42

In the 2003 Town of Palmer Lake Comprehensive Plan three community recommendations were made that directly impact parks within Palmer Lake.

There were:

1. "Parks: Investigate the development of a Parks Association or District for the purposes of acquiring, developing, maintaining park land and coordinating recreational activities and programs for the Town."
2. "Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail System: Encourage civic groups to become involved with the trail development program."
3. "Open Space: Establish an Open Space Committee, composed of local interested citizens, to identify potential open space areas, sources for public acquisition and coordination with bicycle/pedestrian trail development program."

Other parks mentions or omissions from 2003:

1. A trail from Limbaugh Canyon down Monument Creek intersecting with Creekside Trail near Pine Crest recommended.
2. Comfortable walking in downtown core
3. Critical deficiency in downtown core including crosswalks
4. Create Open space - 5% minimum in developments
5. In community recommendations: bike trails, parks, open space, gardens

The 2014 Palmer Lake Centennial Park / The Lake Survey was conducted and it is clear that recreation, parks and open space is becoming more of a priority as between 179 and 198 people, 87% of whom were from Palmer Lake, completed the survey ranking existing facilities improving or expanding, and what new facilities should be considered.

The top 10 of each, from highest (most desired) to lowest ranked are listed below:

Improve or expand existing facilities ranking (5.00 is highest max):

1. Water source for the Lake	4.63
2. Trail system	3.79
3. Ped. Bridge over the RR tracks	3.62 *should not have been listed
4. Restroom on the east side	3.42
5. Landscaping	3.4
6. Playground	3.21
7. Baseball field	3.14
8. Roadway/parking	3.08
9. Pavilion	3.02
10. Volleyball court	2.72

Comment: of these 10 priorities Awake Palmer Lake, the Town, The Parks and Trails

Commission, or El Paso County has worked on or is currently working to improve all of these facilities.

What new facilities should we consider to meet your leisure needs (top 10 listed):

- 1. Pedestrian access across the RR tracks 3.54
- 2. Community garden plot 3.39
- 3. Outdoor hockey rink 3.39
- 4. Fresh water swim area 3.33
- 5. Boating 3.24
- 6. Multi-use field (soccer /lacrosse) 3.23
- 7. Disc Golf 3.23*disc golf was missing from the

list of facilities on 36 survey forms

- 8. XC skiing/snowshoe areas 3.22
- 9. Nature Center 3.06
- 10. Off-leash dog park 2.94

*fishing - one of the most popular Lake activities was missing from all the survey forms.

Only facilities or activities #1, 4, 5, 7 have been accomplished.



A 2015 very limited survey was conducted by some (unclear who) Town entity, but because of the low number of respondents it can't be consider significant.

The Parks and Trails Commission conducted an open ended survey in the fall of 2022 at numerous events in Town to get an updated "view" of what residents and visitors would like to see added or improved in Palmer Lake Parks and Recreation areas.

290 people responded - most of these were done on a face to face basis. The 6 highest ranked with percentages are listed:

- 1. Soccer/lacrosse/football field 35%
- 2. Improving the existing baseball field 21
- 3. Install a restroom on the west side 20
- 4. Improve the playground 13
- 5. Improve parking 10
- 6. Expand & improve trails 10

The 7 most used (number of respondents) facilities are:

- 1. The Lake - kayak, SUP, fishing 80

2. Reservoir Trail	76
3. Picnic tables, benches	75
4. Restroom	70
5. Playground	67
6. Centennial Park loop trail	66
7. Gazebo/ pavilion	66



At the recommendation of the area GOCO representative Palmer Lake Parks and Trails was encouraged to survey the youth who would most benefit from a multi-use field at the south end of The Lake in Centennial Park as to what type of field they would like to have. We reached out to Lewis-Palmer School District 38 and working with their public relations person developed and sent surveys to the parents of students at Palmer Lake Elementary School, Lewis- Palmer Middle School, Palmer Ridge HS, and Monument Academy, plus some parents who were home-schooling their children on May 19, 2023.

As of June 17, 2023 we have received 186 responses from students ages preschool to 17 with an overwhelming 83.2% wanting a soccer field. Roughly the same percentage of students were from Palmer Lake and Monument.

This reinforces a couple of things for the Parks and Trails Commission. First that we should continue to pursue a multi-use field athletic field at the south end of the Lake through a Greater Outdoor Colorado (GOCO) grant, and as an alternate, through a Daniels Fund Grant. Secondly that the trend for the Palmer Lake Recreation Area continues to be a desired area for

all types of recreational activities be it active or passive. The Area has become a destination for residents and visitors alike to enjoy what The Recreation Area as the hub of activities has to offer and then to enjoy the surrounding amenities that support Centennial Park - restaurants, shops, ice-cream, events, and the arts.

The Parks and Trails Commission intends to keep improving and adding recreation facilities, parks, and trails with the help of volunteers, Town staff, and expert help. The Commission needs to keep pace with the growing popularity of Palmer Lake as a recreational hub.

We will not in this 2023 master plan update try to replicate what has been presented in pervious plans such as a detailed historical background, geology, visual analysis, climate, environmental constraints of the Town or the Recreation Area, but focus on the current Recreation Area and Palmer Lake's needs and desires expressed by the community and visitors. The Master Plan provides a framework for the future maintenance, management, and development of the park. The plan seeks to address issues and concerns, and identifies priorities for future improvements at the park.

The Centennial Park Master Plan update provides a 3-5 year vision for the management, maintenance and development of the park. The plan is the product of public engagement and the Town of Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission. It embodies the community's vision to provide active and healthy year-round recreational opportunities while preserving important natural resources for future generations.

5. Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission Vision and Purpose Statement

The vision of the Palmer Lakes Parks and Trails Commission is to have premier town parks, recreation facilities, connecting trails, and service provider on the Colorado Front Range while enhancing the quality of life for residents and adding value to Town visitors' experiences within the historical, small-town atmosphere.

It is a compilation of the contributions made during the master planning process by members of the Parks and Trails Commission, Centennial Park neighbors, users, and survey respondents. The vision is the guiding theme of the design development process for the future of Centennial Park and Palmer Lake Recreation Area.

The Parks and Trails Commission with its purpose to make improvements to and help maintain all parks within the Town; develop, raise money through fundraising, donations, and grants; and research potential new facilities, parks, and trails, and create and run events. The Commission also developed its own current master plan which is a five year plan for the future of the Town parks and trails.

The purpose of this plan is to be a guiding, living document for the continued development of Centennial Park. The history of this park since the late 1800's has always been for outdoor recreational activities and we would like to honor that past in our plans moving forward.

When past master plans and comprehensive plans that included Palmer Lake parks and proposed, or community member requests, for parks and their amenities are examined you will find that many of those suggestions, requests, or plans have been neglected, overlooked, or underfunded.

The current all-volunteer Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission with the help of the Public Works Department and other entities want to correct those past omissions.

6. Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Mission Statement

The mission of the Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission is to ensure the responsible stewardship of Palmer Lake Parks and Trails and their funding. Ensuring that Palmer Lake parks and trails are well maintained, safe, and meet the current and future needs of the public; to provide high quality year-round recreational amenities and opportunities for residents and visitors. Our values include access for all; promotion of healthy lifestyles for youth and adults; support for Town economic vitality through recreational facilities and programs.

Parks are not intended to be profit generating for the Town, but they do improve the quality of life for those who use them and draw users into the recreation hub so that they may also take advantage of all of the Town's amenities.

7. Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission Goals

1. Provide safe, well maintained park space, trails, and facilities for youth and adults
2. Meet the parks and recreational needs of our growing and historic community
3. Enhance and support current amenities while looking toward future needs
4. Advocate and plan for sufficient recreational amenities and no loss of recreational amenities during times of growth
5. Develop and manage park space and trails with respect for the natural Environment
6. Identify and develop public – private partnerships for fundraising.
7. Research and develop trails that provide much needed safe connectivity within the Town and between Town parks
8. Look for and advocate for new Town parks and trails

8. Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission Objectives

The objectives required to reach our goals are as follows:

1. Meet and exceed safety standards set forth by parks and recreation industry and known best practices
2. Remain in touch with Town needs and trends in recreational programming, parks facilities, and safe trails while remaining responsible to fiscal realities
3. Continue to apply long term vision to short term needs. Not every eventuality can be anticipated, but a well-planned parks and trail program will best serve the neighbors and Town at large.
4. Participate in Town Board of Trustee meetings as needed to be aware of parks and recreation opportunities, and challenges associated with future development and budget restraints.
5. Participate as needed in Town Board of Trustee and department meetings so as to foster communication and cooperation between departments.
6. Monitor environmental risks and mitigate those risks through appropriate vegetation mitigation, weed control, drainage issues, and use of native plants where appropriate.
7. Current and future park space should complement and enhance existing natural settings.
8. Develop a good working relationship with the Public Works Department, and other Town departments so that they help foster Parks and Trails goals and objectives.
9. Work with other groups within the Town to help create more recreational opportunities for the Town citizens and visitors.

1. Current Conditions soil, wildlife, vegetation in and around the Lake

The 11.84 acre (at its fullest) Lake area is characterized by various wildlife: mule deer, bear, mountain lion, bobcat, fox and raccoon.

Numerous birds frequent the Lake which has two wildlife areas including:

Bald Eagle

Great Blue Heron

Osprey

Belted Kingfisher	Canada Goose	Double-crested Cormorant
Snipe	Bufflehead	Common Goldeneye
Green-winged Teal	Gulls	Mallards
Northern Shoveler	Pie-billed Grebe	Ring-necked Duck
Western Grebe	Spotted Sandpiper	Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker	Lewis's Woodpecker	American crow
Brewers Blackbird	Red-winged Blackbirds	Black-billed Magpies
Common Grackles	Northern Flicker	Tree Swallows
Western Tanager	American Goldfinch	Chipping Sparrow
Dark-eyed Juncos	House Finch	Marsh Wrens
Mountain Bluebirds	Tree Swallows	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Yellow warbler.	Turkey,	Golden Eagle

The Lake is stocked annually by the Colorado department of Fish and Game with Rainbow Trout, Large Mouth Bass, Blue Gill, Yellow Perch, Catfish, and Northern Pike according to FishExplore.com and local experts.

Other wildlife includes:

Painted Turtles	Mourning Cloak Butterfly	Common Garter snake	Dragonflies
(usually 12 -spotted skimmer)	Little Green Snake	Northern Water Snake	

Vegetation includes willow, elm, cottonwood trees, water grasses, chokecherry, oak, pine,

10. Water in The Lake

There has always been concerns about the water level in the lake. In 1989 the lake water had dropped due to lack of adequate flow from springs and from evaporation. Dr. Paul Grogger, a local geologist, performed a study and made recommendations. The water level dropped so low that in 1994 the CO Division of Wildlife stopped stocking the lake.

The Palmer Lake Restoration Project, Inc., a Colorado non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation— was formed by concerned local residents in 1995 to work towards the restoration of the Lake and surrounding park, which due to drought and budget issues had fallen into disrepair. Some progress was made but then the committee was inactive for a number of years.

The prolonged drought cycle from 2002 through 2013 brought Awake the Lake back to active status. This drought, along with State restrictions on what water could legally be artificially added to the lake, resulted in a completely dry lake bed in 2013. Awake the Lake volunteers worked with Town staff and the Town's water attorneys, to changed water rights owned by the Town to create a viable source of supplemental fill to what is otherwise a natural body of water. The Town lacked the funding, staff, and know-how to push these issues. Awake the Lake began in earnest its grassroots fundraising efforts to restore Palmer Lake.

Awake the Lake embarked on geotechnical, geologic, hydrogeological, and engineering studies to try to better understand what natural means are available to fill the lake and how dry ups can be prevented in the future. They found that Palmer Lake does not currently have any source of surface inflow, nor any outlets, being a glacially formed lake. It is not located on the channels of nearby North Monument Creek to the south, nor Plum Creek to the north.

Awake the Lake took advantage of the Lake being completely empty to remove non-native soils and silts built up in the bed of the lake over time, making it very shallow and sensitive to drought and evaporation. The geological studies performed by the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs' geology department and other geologists, learned that the lake does not fill from the "bottom up" via a spring. On the west side of the lake there is a shallow spring that brings in some water. To reduce evaporation and to return the lake to its natural footprint, the south end of the lake was filled in.



In 2015 the town completed their work in water court to change a senior water right to municipal uses that included supplemental fill of Palmer Lake. In May 2015 substantial rainfall and spring activity naturally filled the lake to nearly 8 feet on the north end. On June 24, 2015, Palmer Lake began supplementing lake levels with water from the reservoir. The Division of Wildlife began again stocking Palmer Lake with fish in the fall of 2015. Town now supplements the natural fill of the Lake every April and May as water levels in the reservoir allow..

Awake the Lake volunteers continue to study and monitor the Lake, including monthly data collection from wells along the perimeter of the Lake, precipitation data, and town water contributions. The current maximum depth of the water at its deepest point is 9.60' and 11.84 acres when it is at its fullest. This is an attempt to better understand how the groundwater levels surrounding the lake are seasonally and drought affected, and how such fluctuations affect Lake Levels. Awake the Lake continues to explore how the lone historical surface water inflow to the Lake at the northwest corner, which 30 years ago was blocked by the Railroad in their efforts to diminish flooding of their tracks, might also be restored.

With the emergent Lake issues seemingly resolved, Awake the Lake turned its efforts towards improving the connectivity of the Lake and its facilities to the main part of Town along State highway 105. They obtaining on the Town's behalf a \$350,000 matching grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) for improvement of the "Rockin the Rails" park (west side of the RR tracks), including improved parking facilities along Highway 105, and the centerpiece of the project: a pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks connecting the east and west sides of the Park.

https://web.archive.org/web/20150711131000/http://ccm.static2.adgic.com/uploads/original/1436241131_58cd.jpg

11. The Lake and Park become a Recreational HUB

A baseball team was formed in the early to mid-1900s. Did they round the bases as today's Littler Leaguers do in the same location? The baseball field on the west side of the RR tracks received upgrades with the addition of parking, fencing, landscaping and bleachers.

In 1911, two hundred cottonwood trees, fifty maples, fifty black locust, and one hundred variegated trees were planted around the Lake. In 1993, eight large ash trees were planted along the 105 highway in the park as part of the Colorado State Forest Service's "Street Tree" program. In 2022 two memorial evergreens were planted at the north end of the Lake.

Parks and El Paso County Parks work together and in 1982, the Santa Fe Regional Trail was established by El Paso County Parks along the vacated RR track bed on the east side connecting Palmer Lake to the Air Force Academy. In 1986, a 25 year renewable lease was negotiated with El Paso County Parks Department on the lake and adjacent property. The lake's

east side was graded and seeded, a playground, parking facilities, rest room, picnic tables, sand volleyball court, horseshoe pit, floating dock, and “fee for use” pavilion were added to the Recreation Area by El Paso County Parks as that property was El Paso County’s.



The trailhead for the Santa Fe Regional Trail, and future Front Range Trail linking the entire Front Range, is on the east side. Currently you can hike, run or bike from just south of Castle Rock to the south side of Colorado Springs along the trail.

The Gazebo built in 1982 at the North West corner of Centennial Park (then known as Village Green Park, or Historic Railroad Park, and also Railroad Park) is the first facility travelers see as they enter town from the north. An opportunity was gained and lost in just a couple of years when in 1985 the Baldwin Steam engine was located there and then moved to Black Hawk in 1996. The gazebo is used annually for Holiday decorations, a small music venue during different festivals including the Wine Festival and private ceremonies. The steps and rails were rebuilt and upgraded by the Parks and Trails Commission members and volunteers in 2022.

Winterfest was celebrated in 1988 with a pancake breakfast followed by broom ball competition on the lake, races and sleigh rides. Daytime ice skating was allowed when safe to do so. It was revived by the current Parks and Trails Commission in 2019 and was featured by a Denver International Airport display the winter of 2021-2022. The Broom Ball Tournament has become more popular each year. In 2023 we saw 10 teams compete in different categories.

In September 2010, The Town and El Paso County Parks signed an MOU as an update to the expired lease agreement (September 2009) that expanded the Town’s management of the Recreation Area, including the playground, pavilion, docks, coordination of special event management and Lake use for recreation purposes. It also rescinded the lease agreement of 1983 for some of the property on the east side, deeding it to The Town of Palmer Lake. 2021 the horseshoe pits were converted by Palmer Lake Parks to a large swing area as well as a tetherball pole as citizen input requested the swings be added and there was little horseshoe pit



use.

Palmer Lake Recreation Area's use has gradually, and then over the last 4-5 years, exponentially become more popular, not just with residents but visitors from all over the front Range. Some of this popularity was also brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic and the construction on I-25 between Castle Rock and Monument Hill. Many drivers sought to avoid the "Gap Project", as it was known, by getting off in Larkspur or Monument and driving through Palmer Lake - "discovering" the Palmer Lake Recreation Area, area trails, and restaurants.

Over the years the Lake has been a year-round fishing destination, stocked annually by the Colorado Department of Fish and Game. The children's fishing tournament started in 1989 and continues to this day sponsored by the Lions Club every 1st Saturday in June.

The annual fireworks display held over the Lake every 4th of July, conditions allowing. This iconic celebration of our Nation's Independence is attended every year by an estimated 10,000 people seated around the Recreation Area and neighborhoods. The "bombs bursting in air" over and reflecting off of the Lake, lighting up Ben Lomand, and echoing off Sundance Mountain is a not to be missed event. In 2021 the event was renamed the Festival on the Fourth and expanded into more than just the fireworks. This amazing event is managed and fundraised by local volunteers and Awake Palmer Lake.

On May 1, 2001 the William Crawford Memorial at the north end of the Lake on El Paso County property was dedicated. The Memorial honors Master Sargent Crawford for his service during WWII and being the recipient of the Medal of Honor for bravery. It is maintained by the American Legion Tri-Lakes Post 9-11 and the funds to build it were donations in the form of donor bricks installed at the memorial.



Rockin' The Rails Disc Golf Course first 9 holes were installed in 2013 by the local Tri-Lakes Disc Golf Club, and the second 9 in 2015. Part of the course design was by the USAFA Engineering Department student cadets. Through an arrangement with the Town they maintain and improve the course throughout the year. It is one of the most popular attractions in the Park. Tournaments, such as "Phantom of the Lake Glow Event" held in late October is attended by "golfers" from all along the Front Range.

The Lake established as a "use at your own risk" facility when the Lake Rules were revised and adopted by Ordinance No. 11-2020 in August 2020 by the Board of Trustees. With some changes to Monument Lake's use rules led to increased non-

motorized water craft - SUP, kayaks, canoe - use at Palmer Lake.

The Annual 4th of July 4 Mile fun run from The Lake down the Santa Fe Regional Trail to Monument benefitting Palmer Lake Elementary School started in 1982 is a must do, not just for the exercise but for enjoying the beauty of the trail as you descend toward our neighbors to the south east. In 2022 over 1400 runners participated. Olympian Frank Shorter has run it why not you!

The annual .5K fun run sponsored by Awake the Lake as a fundraiser for Centennial Park improvements started in 2018 and had 870 participants in 2022.

The above two running events directly benefit Palmer Lake however the Recreation Area is used by area middle school and high school cross country teams for their meets, and by private groups for various races and training, such as the Land Sharks Club which works with youth in the area. 2022 El Paso County opened the Santa Fe Open Space just 1/2 mile south of Centennial Park and refurbished the restroom in 2021-22 bringing it up to ADA standards. They also installed a bicycle repair and maintenance station, and added sand to the volleyball court in 2023.

In January 2022 a hockey event was created the week before Winterfest pitting Cheyenne Mountain High School against Lewis-Palmer High School. In 2023 "The Palmer Lake Outdoor Classic" expanded to 4 high schools over two days and has been a great success enjoyed by over 1000 spectators as a fundraiser for the high schools.

2022 Palmer Lake Parks and Trails created and published with funds from and the assistance of the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce the first ever Palmer Lake Parks and Trails flyer as a guide for visitors.

Palmer Lake Parks and Trails with assistance from Public Works and Awake The Lake maintains the playgrounds, pavilion, bathroom, gazebo and the parking lots on the west side, emptying trash cans, pet waste stations, and fishing line disposal tubes around the Lake. They also clean up downed limbs and shovel the pedestrian bridge. Parks has also worked to upgrade the playground with new swings, added benches around the lake and at the bridge exit off the east side which provides a great 360 degree view of the Palmer Divide.

12. Access and Connections

The recreation area of Centennial Park is located on the east side of State Highway 105 that runs through Palmer Lake from Monument and I-25, 3 miles to the south, to the north end of the Park where it turns north toward Sedalia. The Park can also be accessed from Larkspur 9 miles to the north along Spruce Mountain Road, and from I-25 3 miles east on County Line Road.

There is one entrance at the north end of the Park, east side of the RR tracks off of County Line Road which serves as a parking area to access the Santa Fe Regional Trail (which connects all the way to Colorado Springs), New Santa Fe Open Space, restroom, pavilion, and the Lake and its only dock. There are four entrances to parking areas, the baseball field, the pedestrian bridge, first 2 holes of the disc golf course, and the gazebo / picnic area off Hwy 105 on the west side of the Park.

One of the major goals for fundraising, GOCO grant, and building the Pedestrian Bridge that crosses over the railroad track was to connect the two sides of the Recreation Area, thus avoiding a shared crossing by pedestrians, bicyclists, runners, horseback riders with cars and trucks at the north end RR crossing that was designed for motor vehicles. This feature provides connectivity for Recreation Area users the ability to cross State Highway 105 at 3 designated pedestrian crossings, thus they can access the major amenities of the Town - its restaurants and trails such as Kent Street connection to Creekside Trail and Glen Park, and to the Reservoir Trail into the mountains behind Town.

It is estimated by El Paso County Parks and Palmer Lake Roads department that there are approximately 85 parking spaces including 1 ADA space on the east side, and 230 parking spaces on the west of the Lake for park and restaurants users. In 2022 The Town, Parks, and El Paso County Parks began jointly exploring the possibility of adding an additional 25 spaces on the east side by changing the parking alignment from parallel to 45 degree

parking. It would entail some excavation work and installing a 2' high retaining wall. This would help meet some of the needs brought on by the increased popularity of the Lake and opening of the New Santa Fe Open Space.



13. Utilities: lights, water, sewer, storm water drainage

Utilities on the east side are limited in the Recreation Area at this time as the Park and Santa Fe Trail are closed after sunset until sunrise. There is water at the restroom, electricity for pavilion users, no street lights or storm water drainage infrastructure as the terrain is flat around the Lake.

On the west side there is access to electricity as of late summer 2023 with the installation of 400 amp service near the pedestrian bridge that will provide future upgraded lighting to the parking area across from O'Malley's and the former Depot restaurant, to the bridge - both east and west entrances and safety lights along the ceiling.

There's electricity at the baseball field but no current ballfields lights or scoreboard and no evening games. The sewer line runs the entire length of the west side paralleling the RR tracks, and behind the restaurants along St.Hwy. 105 in some of the areas.

Storm water drainage is not present on the west side in the Park and although there is a slight slope off State Highway 105 into the parking areas the Public Works Department has upgraded the parking areas with millings and proper grading and has mitigated most of the runoff issues. Future parking lot improvements are planned north of the ball field and south of the bridge behind the restaurants. Parking is currently available but formalized spaces,

lighting, and landscaping are in the 3 year plan.

Detailed sewer locations can be obtained from the Palmer Lake Sanitation Department, and water line details from the Town of Palmer Lake Water Department. Detailed electric lines from CORE and 811 locates.

14. Specific Goals and Objectives of the Master Plan for Centennial Park

What follows is the list of Park and Trails Commission activities by priority creating a 3-5 year specific vision for the Parks and Trails Commission. This list will be correlated with the annual Parks and Trails Projects list as activities are completed and as activities need to be reprioritized to the next year for reasons such as lack of funding or manpower.

A. Ongoing Annual Activities

1. Install fountain in lake, water levels permitting, in the spring, remove in the fall.
2. Mitigate noxious weeds
3. Replenish playground and swings cushioning as needed
4. Service in the Parks Day - at least one, most years, two.
5. Lions Club Fishing Derby
6. Maintain trees around the Lake
7. Plant appropriate trees around the Lake as old ones die.
8. Playground and facility insurance inspections
9. Maintain the trail, pavilion, gazebo, docks and other facilities by inspecting them each spring and establishing a plan for their maintenance.
10. Annual fundraiser fun runs - work with sponsors.

B. Ongoing Monthly Activities

1. Mow grass areas as needed on the west side
2. Mow grass areas in the disc golf area - by Tri-Lakes Disc Golf Club
3. Communicate with Awake Palmer Lake on projects, needs, plans, and fundraisers.
4. Monthly playground inspections and corrections by Public Works chief inspector and expert.

C. Ongoing Weekly Activities

1. Clean up trash and fallen limbs, trim branches around lake, empty trash cans,

empty fishing line & hook collection boxes, pet waste stations

2. Clean the restroom on the east side (May - September)

2023

- Install two benches along east side of bridge (completed by Eagle Scouts May)
- Write Master Plan update for the Palmer Recreation Area and Centennial Park
- There are two grants are being written for a multi-use field on south end of the lake. Daniel's Fund is still under review and GOCO grant concept will be completed in July. Complete research on multi-use field. Connect with area sports groups about their involvement with multi-use field.
- Survey PLES, LPMS, PRHS youth and local clubs about uses for CP south end area.
- Work with PLVFD to cut and move about 24 6' long logs from the Upper Reservoir for Disc golf to use.
- Meet with Little League (July) to discuss improvements on ball field and funding (see list submitted to PL Parks and Trails and the Town for their multi year plan). Get a signed MOU from them.
- Work with private donor, foundation about funding the improvements to the baseball field, include their multi-year plan for improvement and combine with the Little League plans.
- Review a 3 year plan by Little League to improve the field through MOU. Monitor and work with them and other donor to achieve their's and Parks Commission goals.
- Meet with ATL to brainstorm additional ideas for this master plan
- Work with APL to design a small strip park between restaurants and parking lot.
- ATL to install stone steps on south and north ends of east exit of pedestrian bridge along with appropriate landscaping. Install safety fence along east side of pedestrian exit off bridge.
- Work with Disc golf club to plan a rearrange of the holes that are affected by the east bridge landscaping and pickle ball courts working to have all holes on the east side of the bridge, with hole 1 starting and hole 18 ending near the bridge stairs on the east side.
- ATL was awarded a grant for 6 pickle ball courts and a restroom on the west side of the RR tracks. See their grant proposal for timeline details, and work with them to determine best location and design for the restroom. Compare with EPC Parks restrooms.
- Meet with a designer to begin planning for a restroom design for the west side. Meet with Town Departments to help determine the best location because of utilities.

- Contract with an appropriate company to repair the pour-in-place playground surface by fall, once scheduled and poured secure appropriate fencing and security for the 24 hour curing.
- Research the cost of repairing the gazebo's weather vane.
- Begin a 2 year trail improvement project along the west side of the Lake trail to prevent a muddy trail, and therefore social widening of the trail.
- Install an information kiosk at the west exit of the bridge parking area by Eagle Scout.
- Work with Disc Golf to begin a 3 year basket replacement project.
- Install Handicapped parking signs and spaces where appropriate in the Recreation Area's parking lots.
- Install power box from the 400 amp power pole as a prelude to the bridge lighting installation
- Submit bridge lighting plan to RR for approval. Once approved contract with electrician for installation by late fall.
- Do the necessary work to insure that the bridge entrances are accessible by wheelchairs.

2024

- Establish and sign handicapped parking slot(s) in the parking areas along Highway 105
- Install new power pole and lighting near baseball field
- Establish and begin the work for a plan to improve the parking area north of the ball field and south of the bridge - lighting, designated spaces, landscaping.
- Order and Install a bear proof trash cans through a grant in the Disc Golf course at a site approved by them, at west side restroom, pickle ball courts, and near multi-use field.
- Order and install pet waste stations through a grant near pickle ball courts an other locations approved by Parks.
- Brush and clean up behind restaurants (? MHYC). Develop a small strip park between the restaurants and the parking area working with APL
- Develop plan for bulletin board near restrooms
- Determine and Install appropriate new trees around lake (grant permitting)
- Have an arrangement with El Paso County for the Lake parking area expansion and control as discussed with them in 2022.
- Work with ATL to help with the completion of the Pickle Ball courts by summer.
- If GOCO grant or Daniels Fund grant for multi-use field is awarded work to have the field installed by June 1st.

- When multi-use field is built have relationships with local soccer, lacrosse, and youth football clubs in place for maintenance, tournaments, and league play.
- Work with Town Roads and Water Departments, and Palmer Lake Sanitation to place movable blocks/ boulders at the south and north running dirt road along the railroad track at the Art Center parking area and the end of the RR fence to the south.
- Work with Disc Golf Club to design and install appropriate warning signs along the Lake once the holes are rearranged.
- Establish a shed hill down the east facing bridge exit slope
- Research the costs and process for a skating rink to be assembled each winter on the Lake. Work with D-38 high schools as they have experience doing so.
- Finish the conversion of the treed area where the current Disc Golf holes 1 & 2 reside into a car free picnic and sitting area.
- Complete the movement of Disc Golf's holes 1 & 2 to the east side of the RR tracks.
- Complete the landscaping along the east facing slope of the pedestrian bridge.
- Work with PLVFD to move about 30 4-6' long sections of logs from the Upper Reservoir so that parks can build and install benches around the Recreation area - 3 - 4 each year.
- Continue to research and look into the installation of a free standing shade structure for over the playground. Decide on a style, secure funding, and order for installation.

2025

- Remove three park benches across from Art center and place them in a better location
- Repair and replace cedar posts along north end of RR tracks and trail
- Finish cedar fencing along RR
- Put sand and boulders near north end boat launch to stabilize the area and create another boat launch area closer to the pedestrian bridge.
- Put in exercise centers for outdoor fitness equipment (grant contingent)
- Possibly takeover of maintenance of the Crawford Memorial at their request.
- Explore the addition of a free standing climbing boulder for the playground
- Expansion of the parking on the east side as discussed with El Paso County Parks in 2022.

15. Summary of Recommendations in General Terms

- Develop a “Volunteer in the Parks” or “Friends of the Parks” Program
- State Highway 105 crosswalks connecting The Palmer Lake Recreation Area and the west side of Town with access to trails, other parks, and restaurants needs to be continually improved. Safe, easy connectivity is the goal.
- The budget for Parks and Trails needs to be raised to provide for additional, at least seasonal, staff to meet the short and long term goals and objectives of the Commission.
- It is proposed to leave Centennial Park in as natural state as possible with improvements to blend into the natural surroundings. New facilities and equipment should be constructed of material which is as maintenance free as possible due to dependence on inconsistent paid staff, budget, and volunteers.
- If The Town of Palmer Lake can eventually secure control of the parking area on the East side, which is now El Paso County, consider very seriously the installation of a paid parking kiosk. The funds would be used to off-set the cost of area maintenance and improvements - initially for Centennial Park use only.

16. Relationships with other entities

Palmer Lake Parks and Trails has developed relationship with numerous entities that share the same goals: improving and maintaining the Palmer Lake Centennial Park, and the Lake.

These include:

Palmer Lake Public Works Department
El Paso County Parks - including an MOU
Awake Palmer Lake - including an MOU
Tri-Lakes Little League
Tri-Lakes Disc Golf Club - including an MOU
Festival on the Fourth Committee
Colorado Division of Wildlife
Mile High Youth Corp
American Legion - Crawford Memorial - including an MOU
Palmer Lake Elementary School - 4th of July Run
Lions Club - Annual Fishing Derby and playground improvement donations

People who have contributed to the Master Plan update:

Cindy Powell - general historical research and photos
Palmer Lake Historical Society for photos and information through their publications
Linda Vier - Lake data - Awake Palmer Lake
Lindsey Leiker - general Lake user information
Greg Feuerhaken - Tri-Lakes Disc Golf Club

Mike Pietsch – fish and photos

Ande Furrer - photos

Terri Watson - birds and wildlife

Tim Caves - Festival on the Fourth, Awake Palmer Lake

Jeff Hulsmann - Awake the Lake, review of the master Plan especially the Water in the Lake chapter.

A number of other people have contributed to this master plan over the years. There was no intent to omit anyone and we apologize if we did. Please let us know and we'll make corrections in subsequent updates. This also applies to factual errors. We tried to get everything correct but may have missed something - let us know please.

Palmer Lake Parks and Trails Commission Members

Cindy Powell

Ande Furrer

Mike Pietsch

Gene Kalesti

Phyllis Head

Reid Wiecks

Public Works Department: Jason Dosch

June 10,