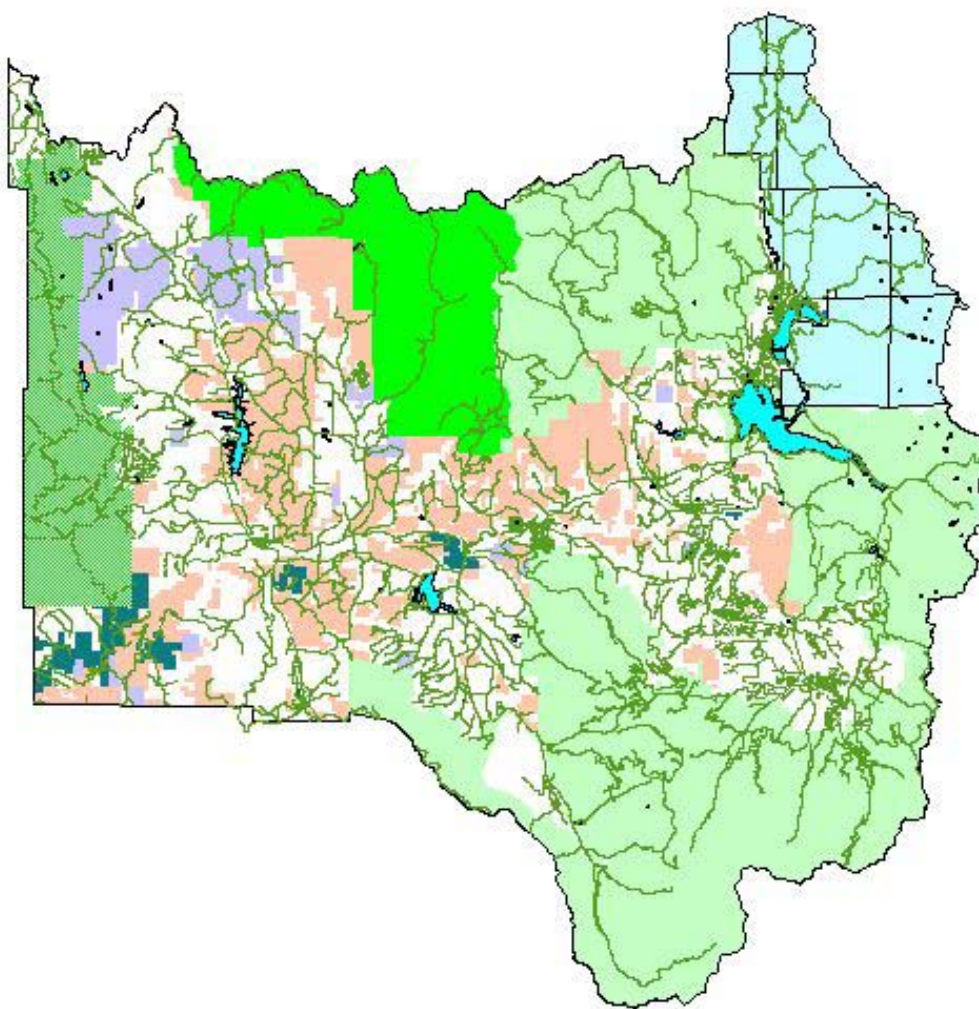


MIDDLE PARK LAND TRUST

LAND CONSERVATION PLAN

2007



A Plan for Land Conservation in Grand County

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Appendix: Conservation Area Map

PART I

Introduction

Middle Park Land Trust (MPLT) is working strategically and opportunistically to conserve the landscapes that make Grand County and its surrounding area grand. Through this work, MPLT will develop partnerships with landowners, local governments, conservation entities, funding agencies and federal and state conservation programs. These partnerships will better enable MPLT to be the local land trust organization that can provide leadership, protect existing conservation easements, ensure open space and preserve unique and important natural resources. To keep Grand County as a nationally significant resource area, the emphasis of this Land Conservation Plan is to provide a road map with focus and priority that will assist MPLT and the Grand County community in preserving and protecting critical wildlife habitat, working ranches, threatened viewsheds, vital wetlands and river corridors.



PART II

Plan Purpose

Grand County is a place of scenic grandeur; western heritage; and nationally recognized, diverse recreational opportunities. The spectacular views, agricultural lands along the Colorado River watershed, high elevation ranges dominated by the Continental Divide, and prolific wildlife habitat provide the area with unique natural resource richness. All of these values and qualities place Grand County in the heart of one of the great parks in Colorado known as “Middle Park”. These values also serve as major economic engines that attract new residents and tourists. The landscape in Grand County and all it provides is fundamental to the character, to the sense of place, and to the quality of life of its residents and visitors alike.

Grand County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state of Colorado resulting in the loss of hundreds and even thousands of acres to development each year. When we, as a community, lose agricultural land and open space; we also lose wildlife habitat, scenic views, water quality and countryside that make Grand County beautiful. Local ranchers are struggling to stay viable in the face of encroaching development and skyrocketing real estate values. It is imperative that we identify and protect the most important natural resource areas if we are to enjoy the balance of a healthy environment and vibrant economy. It is equally important to reach out to diverse stake holders in natural resource conservation, land development and local/municipal government planning efforts.

PART III

Historic Background of Grand County

The history of Grand County is one of economic dependence on natural and scenic resources. Settlement of the Middle Park area began in the early 1800’s as seasonal hunters and trappers followed big game species into the area. By the mid 1800s mining interests had arrived in the rocky mountain west. Although mining never proved profitable in Middle Park, homesteading of ranches and farms began with encouragement from Congress and the Homestead Act of 1862. Logging became a viable industry in the Middle Park area with the eastern portion of Grand County being the center of timber product removal activity. In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, a new movement and philosophy in land

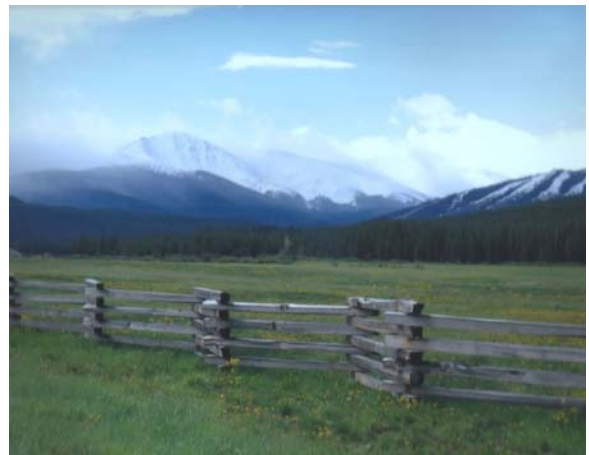
conservation was occurring in the western United States. Locally, this resulted in the creation and establishment of the Arapaho/Roosevelt National Forest, Rocky Mountain National Park, and later the Bureau of Land Management. Over 68% of the land in Grand County is “public land” under federal or state management and administration. The vast majority of this land was not settled during previous decades as the settlers found more suitable agricultural lands at lower elevations along the river corridors.

From the late 19th century through most of the 20th century, Grand County continued to be dependent on a natural resource based economy of ranching, logging and tourism. Historically, many mountain communities within close proximity to the front range of Colorado have developed at more accelerated rates than Grand County. However, that trend is now changing as local landowners and communities have begun to feel the pressures associated with rapid growth and development. Currently, Grand County is known in the development and real estate world as “still a good buy” when compared to other mountain communities such as Summit County, Eagle County, Aspen and Telluride.

PART IV

Current Descriptions and Projections for Grand County

The economic sector of the county has diversified in more recent years. Recreation based retail trade and services continue to dominate the county’s local commercial base. In the past several decades, the tourism industry in Grand County has grown dramatically as a result of ski resort development, increased recreational opportunities and a greater public interest in outdoor activities. Accelerated high-end development in Grand County has resulted in a booming building industry resulting in labor shortages and lack of affordable housing. Increasingly, a greater percentage of the county population will likely be comprised of visitors, seasonal employees, retirees, and second homeowners that benefit from local recreation and natural amenities. The expansion of development, growth and population are inevitable on the Grand County and Middle Park landscape. It is now essential to retain the intrinsic values of the landscape that provide both economic and environmental value for county residents and visitors.



Over the next 20 years, projections are for existing communities in Grand County to expand, with the majority of the expansion occurring in the eastern sector of the county along major highways (US 40 & US 34) and river corridors (Fraser River & Colorado River). Relative areas in and around Winter Park, Fraser, Tabernash, Granby and Grand Lake are expected to experience rapid growth in both development and population gain. For example, in 2005 the town of Granby was among the fastest growing municipalities in the country in terms of total acres annexed. In the past several years Winter Park has dramatically increased its total acres with annexation. Currently, there are over 900 approved subdivisions in Grand County. In the central section of the county near Hot Sulphur Springs, new subdivisions have been approved and are in various stages of development. The Kremmling area and associated landscape in the western portion of the county are experiencing pressure from new development, new social and economic land ownership patterns and population growth. Historic family owned ranches are being sold to Front Range or out of state buyers who in most cases have little or no interest in production agriculture. The Kremmling area is located in a vortex of high volume commercial and tourism traffic due to the convergence of US 40 and US 9. This relative location and

highway access to busy recreation areas such as Winter Park, Steamboat Springs, and Summit County will continue to impact the area in terms of growth and expansion.

PART V

Land Conservation Plan Scope and Focus Areas

In developing this land conservation plan, MPLT analyzed Grand County inventories of natural resources, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, watersheds and viewsheds. MPLT collaborated with other resource conservation based entities such as The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Division of Wildlife and East Grand Water Quality Association in evaluating land ownership patterns and identifying important conservation values throughout the county. Based on this analysis, MPLT has identified two distinct geographical areas of primary focus for implementation of land conservation efforts. These two focus areas are:

- 1) **The Fraser River Valley:** This focus area begins at the headwaters of the Fraser River on Berthoud Pass and ends at the confluence of the Fraser and Colorado Rivers at the Windy Gap Reservoir just west of Granby. The Fraser River is listed as one of the most endangered rivers in the country due to water calls, low flows and impacts from several water treatment facilities on the river. The Fraser Valley community now has a renewed interest in protecting and enhancing the viability of the river. The Fraser Valley offers significant view sheds of the Continental Divide and contains several historic ranches that provide landscapes that are mostly intact with functioning riparian areas and wetlands. These ranches total approximately 15,000 acres with 60% of this total acreage visible from US Highway 40, and the remaining 40% are ranches that are well known in the local and regional community.
- 2) **The Colorado River Corridor and Associated Watersheds:** This focus area begins at the Colorado River Headwaters near Rocky Mountain National Park and ends west of Radium at the Eagle County line. This area will also include major watersheds that flow to the Colorado River such as the Williams Fork River, Blue River, Troublesome Creek and Muddy Creek Pass. The Colorado River Corridor contains significant production agriculture lands, prolific wildlife habitat, gold medal fisheries and prominent view sheds. This entire area offers MPLT with a great opportunity to implement land conservation measures on large intact ranches that would protect mega fauna, globally rare plant species and historical uses of the land. These private properties encompass more than 100,000 acres, of which the majority is visible from US Highways 40 & 9.

PART VI

Land Conservation Plan Objectives

The objectives will outline the framework that will guide the process, prioritization and outcomes of the Plan.

- Identify Geographic Focus Areas.
- Identify and understand public sentiment in Focus Areas.
- Identify and develop a variety of land conservation methods to protect land: Conservation easements, purchase of development rights, locating conservation minded buyers.
- Cultivate meaningful partnerships with other conservation entities.

- Develop internal documents that identify “wish list properties” and priority properties.
- Develop maps that display current status and future possibilities of land conservation efforts in Grand County.
- Nurture relationships with County and Municipal governments and include and update them when appropriate.
- Continue to influence, assist, and support federal and state lawmakers in their land conservation legislation efforts.
- Engage local and second home owner publics in the process.
- Engage diverse special interest groups: Agriculture, Development, Environmental, and Civic.
- Utilize the Land Conservation Plan as a Fundraising Tool.

PART VII

Summary

Middle Park Land Trust has entered into a new era of land conservation possibilities. MPLT continues to grow and mature with increased capacity and a broader more diverse support group of donors and membership. This has provided the organization with the impetus to take the strides necessary to be the local land conservation entity that provides leadership, experience, and cohesiveness in conservation efforts in Grand County. Recent favorable federal and state legislation has given Middle Park Land Trust the opportunity to “ramp up” its land conservation mission in Grand County by reaching out to more landowners with financial incentives. The Land Conservation Plan will help enable MPLT and Grand County communities realize important and meaningful land conservation efforts that are successful on the landscape. Willing landowners who choose to preserve their land will benefit as will a public that has become increasingly supportive of land conservation. As MPLT embraces its role as the local leader in land conservation, we will ensure a natural legacy for generations to come.

