

Appendix C: Policy Guidance

Guidance for developing the Open Space and Mountain Parks Grassland Plan is provided at two levels. First, numerous planning documents have been developed to guide the practices of the Open Space and Mountain Parks Department. These documents are described below, and include: the City of Boulder Charter, the 2007-2012 Strategic Operating Plan, Long Range Management Policies (City of Boulder 1995), resource management plans, area management plans.

The second level of plan guidance is provided at a regional level. Regional plan guidance is provided by the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (City of Boulder 2001b) and the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (Boulder County 1999).

Open Space and Mountain Parks Departmental Mission

The Open Space and Mountain Parks Department preserves and protects the natural environment and land resources that characterize Boulder. We foster appreciation and use that sustain the natural values of the land for current and future generations.

City of Boulder Charter

The management of Open Space and Mountain Parks lands is guided by the City Charter, as approved by the City of Boulder voters in 1986.

Sec. 176. Open Space Purposes - Open space land.

Open space land shall be acquired, maintained, preserved, retained, and used only for the following purposes:

- Preservation or restoration of natural areas characterized by or including terrain, geologic formations, flora, or fauna that is unusual, spectacular, historically important, scientifically valuable, or unique, or that represent outstanding or rare examples of native species;
- Preservation of water resources in their natural or traditional state, scenic areas or vistas, wildlife habitats, or fragile ecosystems;
- Preservation of land for passive recreation use, such as hiking, photography or nature study, and if specifically designated, bicycling, horseback riding, or fishing;
- Preservation of agricultural uses and land suitable for agricultural production;
- Utilization of land for shaping the development of the city, limiting urban sprawl and disciplining growth;
- Utilization of non-urban land for spatial definition of urban areas;
- Utilization of land to prevent encroachment on floodplains; and

- Preservation of land for its aesthetic or passive recreational value and its contribution to the quality of life of the community.

Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan

The Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) establishes coordination between the City of Boulder and Boulder County on planning issues involving both agencies. The Boulder Valley is a Community Service Area within Boulder County where the City and County have agreed upon a set of land use and management policies to implement joint planning objectives. The BVCP states that the environment of the Boulder Valley is a critical asset that must be preserved and protected, and provides the framework within which growth and development may be permitted to take place (City of Boulder 2005).

The current Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, adopted by both the City and the County in 1977, and updated most recently in December, 2005, includes the following sections that have provided guidance for the Grassland Plan:

BVCP Policies-Environment, Economy and Community Design

The environmental policies include the fundamental position that the natural environment is a critical asset, which must be preserved and protected. The BVCP recognizes the effects of land use decisions upon the natural environment and calls upon the city and county to support several objectives including the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity and native ecosystems, ecosystem processes, as well as ecosystem connections and buffers. Other environmental policies specifically address the importance of wetlands conservation, the management of invasive non-native species and sustainable public access to public lands.

Agricultural conservation is included in policies for community design which encourage the preservation and sustainable use of significant agricultural lands and related water supplies as a renewable source of food and fuel. The BVCP economic policies also recognize that on-going agricultural production in the Boulder Valley preserves the valued rural character of the landscape and provides an opportunity for local production of food, fuel, fiber and horticulture products.

The Open Space and Mountain Parks Program Summary

This summary describes the City's current Open Space lands as providing "the basic structure of the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan" (City of Boulder 2005). The BVCP reiterates the charter purposes and functions of Open Space and Mountain Parks and describes the charter-defined role of the OSMP. Other community, environmental and design policies set goals for protecting many features of the Boulder Valley, including the appearance of major entryways, agricultural areas, critical habitat areas, and aquifer and groundwater recharge areas.

The Land Use Map Description-Natural Ecosystem Overlay

This section of the BVCP refers to the comprehensive plan land use map, which includes a natural ecosystem overlay. The BVCP defines natural ecosystems as “areas that support native plants and animals or possess important ecological, biological or geological values that represent the rich natural history of the Boulder Valley” (City of Boulder 2005). Boulder Valley natural ecosystems may also contain features that are rare, unique or sensitive to human disturbance and are essential to maintain the scientific and educational importance of places representing the rich natural history of the Boulder Valley. The Natural Ecosystems overlay identifies these areas as well as ecological connections among habitat blocks and lands that buffer natural ecosystems from the effects of adjacent land use. Most of the GPA is covered by the Natural Ecosystems overlay (**Figure A-1**).

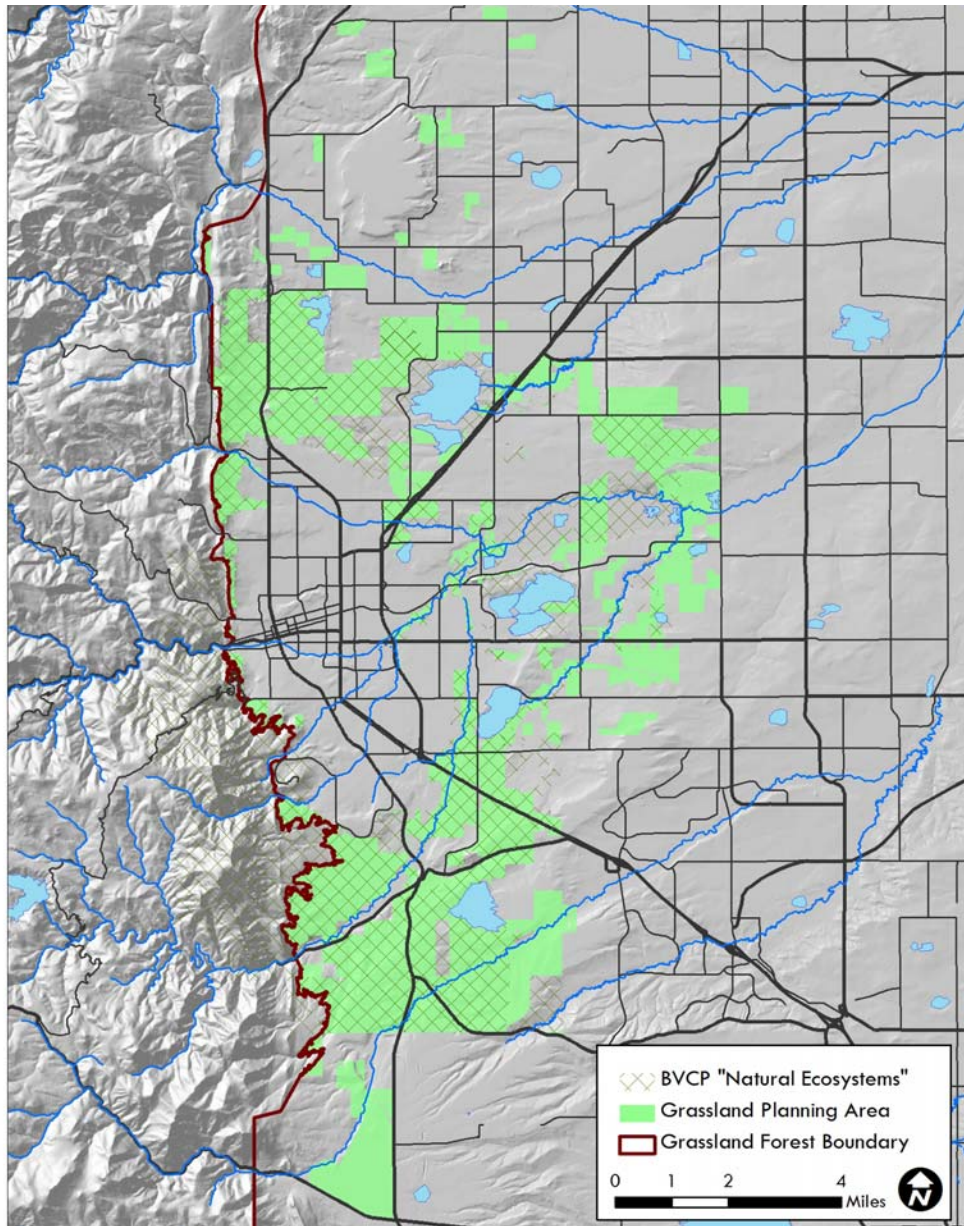


Figure A-1: Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Natural Ecosystem Overlay in the Grassland Planning Area

Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP) (Boulder County 1999)

County comprehensive plans are mandated by state law and address county land use. Much of the Open Space and Mountain Parks land system is under the land use jurisdiction of Boulder County. The plan is also a guide for development in the County's rural areas, outside municipal planning boundaries. Revisions are prepared with the cooperation of municipalities, but are not subject to their approval. The BCCP includes goals and land use designations with related objectives and policies that are relevant to the Grassland Plan. **Figure A-2** shows the location of BCCP map elements in the context of the GPA.

Goals-Environmental Management and Agriculture

The BCCP states that unique or distinctive natural features and ecosystems should be conserved using an ecological approach. The plan also emphasizes the conservation of Critical Wildlife Habitat, Significant Natural Communities, Wetlands, Significant Riparian Corridors, Rare Plant Sites, and Environmental Conservation Areas.

The county comprehensive plan also recognized the economic importance of agricultural resources and states support for a diverse and sustainable agricultural economy largely through the conservation and protection of agricultural lands.

Designations

The BCCP includes designation of Natural Landmarks, Natural Areas, critical wildlife habitat, Critical Plant Associations, Rare Plant Sites and Natural Communities, Wetlands, and Environmental Conservation Areas. Each of these designations was established to achieve a separate set of objectives and is addressed through a set of policies.

Natural Landmarks

Natural Landmarks are prominent features that are important because for their scenic value and associated ecological, geologic, or cultural attributes. The BCCP seeks to protect and conserve Natural Landmarks by mitigating the effects of development and assisting landowners to maintain these areas. Policies relevant to Natural Landmarks direct the county to track the status of these areas, consider and designate new designations when appropriate, and use land use review, open space acquisition and other incentives as conservation tools.

There are two Natural Landmarks associated with the GPA: Table Mountain and Valmont Dike. Although not owned by the city, the federally-owned Table Mountain is adjacent to city owned lands in the GPA, and could form the nucleus of a large block of grassland habitat. Portions of Valmont Dike are owned by the city and managed as Open Space.

Natural Areas

The BCCP defines natural areas as places where the natural character persists either as native vegetation, and associated biological and geological features, or as habitat for rare species, or places where the natural features including geology have special scientific or educational value. The objectives for Natural Areas are protection for the resources that characterize the sites, and allowing select opportunities for education and research. Policies relevant to Natural Areas direct

the county to track the status of these areas, consider and designate new designations when appropriate, use land use review, open space acquisition and other incentives as conservation tools.

There are three Natural Areas within the GPA: Marshall Mesa, South Boulder Creek (including Tallgrass Prairie), and White Rocks. South Boulder Creek, Tallgrass Prairie and a portion of the White Rocks are also state-designated natural areas.

Critical Wildlife Habitat

This designation is derived critical habitat designated by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and includes other areas “which the county may choose to designate” (Boulder County 1999 ER 4.02). There are no specific objectives for Critical Wildlife Habitat. The wildlife habitat policies are focused upon avoiding impacts to wildlife habitat through land use review and managing and studying wildlife habitat through the county’s open space program.

There are eight areas within the GPA identified in the BCCP as Critical Wildlife Habitat: Boulder Valley Ranch, the Cottonwood Grove on Boulder Creek, Sawhill Ponds, White Rocks, Cottonwood Grove and Heronry, South Boulder Creek, Tallgrass Prairie and Marshall Mesa

Critical Plant Associations, Rare Plant Sites and Natural Communities

These designations are identified by the county using staff, volunteers and other professionals. While there are no specific objectives, the associated policies emphasize the protection of these areas through land use controls, acquisitions by the county open space program as well as cooperation and technical assistance with other agencies and land owners.

There are four county-identified “natural communities” in the GPA: Three wet prairie parcels and one xeric tallgrass parcel.

Rare plant sites in the GPA include areas supporting Bell’s twin bladderpod, dwarf leadplant, American groundnut, black spleenwort, prairie gentian, and Ute ladies’-tresses orchid.

Critical Plant Associations are not mapped in the 1999 BCCP. Maps printed in 1991 show the following Critical Plant Associations in the GPA: New Mexico feathergrass mixed prairie, needle and thread grass mixed prairie and big bluestem-switchgrass-little bluestem-indian grass tallgrass prairie.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas

The BCCP makes reference to, but does not define or show the location of significant wetlands. Significant riparian corridors are shown on a map, but qualified as the result of a limited review. Policies associated with wetlands and riparian areas focus on conservation of these resources through land use review as well as acquisition and coordination/technical assistance with other agencies and landowners.

The following areas in the GPA are identified as significant riparian corridors: Boulder Creek downstream of the Green Ditch headgate, Coal Creek from the Jefferson County line to S. 66th street (projected), and South Boulder Creek from the mouth of Eldorado Canyon to the South Boulder ditch headgate.

Environmental Conservation Areas

Environmental Conservation Areas are large and relatively undeveloped areas of the County that possess a high degree of naturalness, contain high quality or unique landscape features and/or have significant restoration potential. Size, quality and geographic location make them an important tool for combating the effects of habitat fragmentation. The county's objectives for Environmental Conservation Areas are to protection of the values associated with large habitat blocks in conserving wide-ranging, ecologically specialized, or human sensitive species by managing adjacent land uses (providing buffers) and fostering connectivity among blocks. The policies direct the county to use land use review, acquisition, and management of these areas to maintain and restore their ecological function.

County Environmental Conservation Areas overlap with much of the GPA, especially in the northern, southern and northeastern area where large blocks of Open Space and Mountain Parks land form the basis of the Environmental Conservation Area designation.

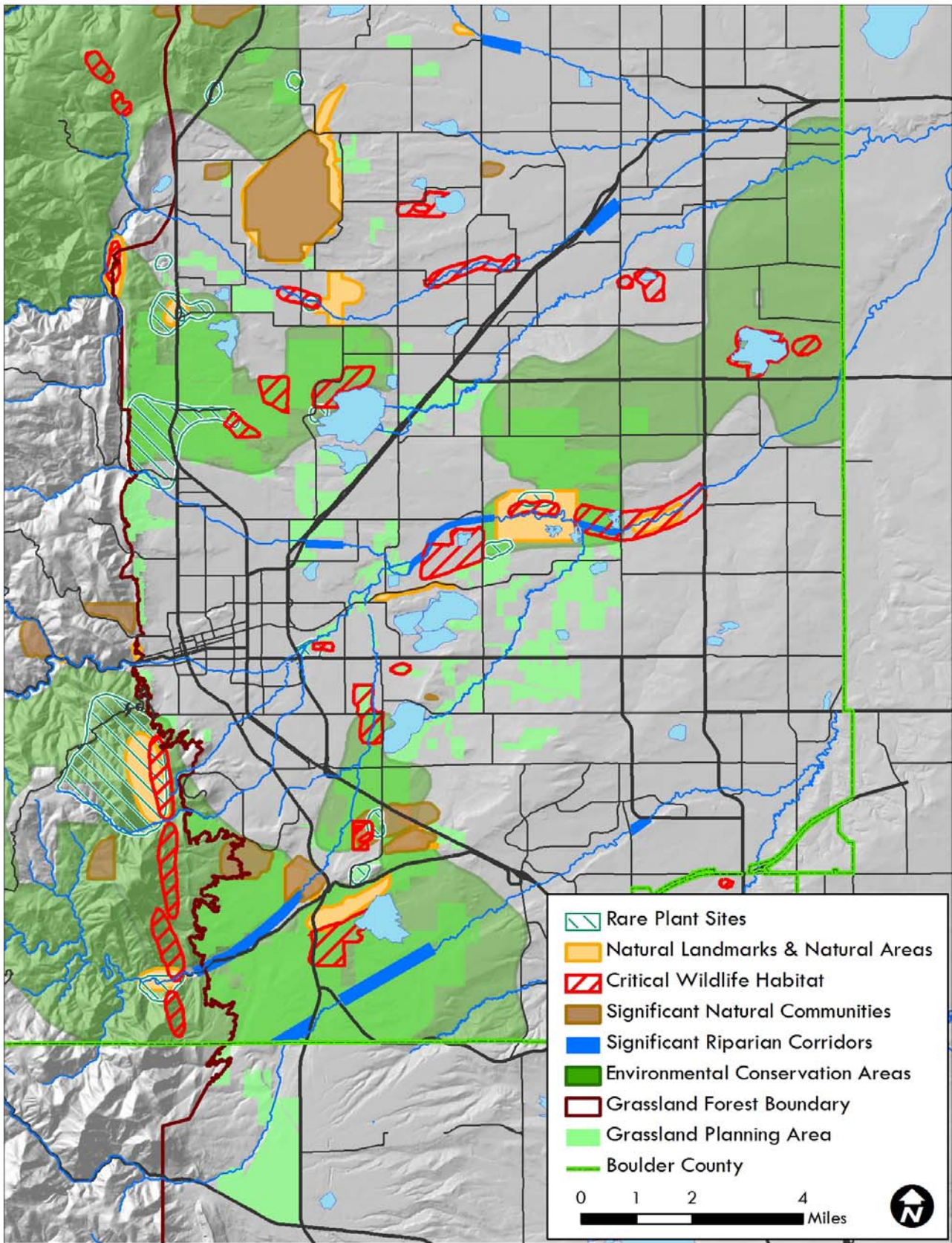


Figure A-2: Boulder County Comprehensive Plan Environmental Resource Element designations in the Grassland Planning Area