



PRESS RELEASE

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\$10.15 Million Approved for Conservation Projects in Rocky Mountain Arsenal Region

First of Two Settlement Funds will Help Build Regional Open Space Network

DENVER—The Colorado Natural Resource Damages Trustees have awarded \$10,150,000 in funding for 11 conservation projects in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. The projects encompass more than 800 acres and are expected to leverage another \$31 million in additional funding to build a regional, integrated greenway and open space network.

“After many years of litigation, it is gratifying to see this process come full circle for the benefit of Colorado,” said Colorado Attorney General John Suthers. “The settlement funds will support outstanding projects and organizations that will benefit generations of people and wildlife habitats.”

The project funding is related to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal natural resource damages settlements. In May 2008, the State of Colorado, the U.S. Army and Shell Oil Company agreed to the largest natural resource damage settlement in the state’s history. The money is held in a \$10 million Foundation Fund and a \$17.4 million Recovery Fund. According to federal law, states may recover money from entities that damage natural resources and use that money to fund projects that restore, replace, or acquire the equivalent of the injured natural resources.

“This is great news for conservation and for the restoration of our lands and waters in the metropolitan area,” said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. “These projects will go a long way to turn the vision of the Rocky Mountain Greenway Project, one of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors projects in Colorado, into a reality. Today exemplifies the kind of long-term planning and partnership we need to conserve our open spaces and connect people to the great outdoors.”

The Trustees approved expenditure of funds from the Foundation Fund, recommended by the Northeast Greenway Advisory Committee, comprised of Adams County, Aurora, Brighton, Commerce City, Denver, Thornton and the Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership. The group has been working for eight years to advocate and fund projects benefiting the environment and quality of life throughout the Northeast Corridor.

“This is regional cooperation at its best,” said Howard Kenison, chairman of the Advisory Committee. “Every one of these projects has been on the books for a long time in the local community. Together, they’ll create a network of open space, protected stream and riparian corridors, and restored ecosystems that will be a natural resource legacy for the Front Range.”

Projects were evaluated by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. They generally fall in several categories: 1) protect surface and groundwater and restore native habitat; 2) preserve the South Platte River and its tributaries; 3) conserve open space in fast-growing areas; 4) build on local government initiatives and priorities; 5) protect migration corridors and key habitat.

“The Trustees have taken an historic first step toward a greener future for the South Platte River Corridor and the entire Front Range of Colorado,” said Martha Rudolph, environmental programs director for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. “Compensation for past natural resource damage at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal will help restore degraded areas along the river; save existing open spaces from encroaching development and preserve a natural haven for present and future generations of birds, fish, mammals, plants and humans alike.”

“These projects advance our ongoing efforts to restore our rivers, landscapes and wildlife in a way that is good not only for our environment, but for people,” said Mike King, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. “Our interaction with the natural world enriches, energizes and strengthens us and through these projects we bring more opportunity to more residents to appreciate the extraordinary environments that often lie just beyond our homes and streets.”

The Colorado Natural Resource Damages Trustees include the State Attorney General, the executive director of the Department of Health and Environment and the executive director of the Department of Natural Resources.

Following is a brief description of each project. Full project descriptions are in the Northeast Greenway Corridor Regional Restoration Plan, posted at www.northeastgreenwaycooridor.org

Adams County: 88th Avenue Project

- \$1.75 million for 246-acre site to enhance riparian forest and habitat as well as the ecological integrity of two former gravel mines.
- Contact: Ruth Kedzior/720.523.6111/RKedzior@adcogov.org

City of Thornton: Big Dry Creek

- \$750,000 for 130-acre site near Interstate 25, including habitat restoration, for use as open space.
- Contact: Todd Barnes/303.358.7279/todd.barnes@cityofthornton.net.

City of Brighton: Eagle Preservation

- \$500,000 for 42 acres in the future 178-acre Prairie Lakes Regional Wildlife Center to return to a natural state and preserve water quality and habitat for birds and wildlife.
- Contact: Gary Wardle/303.655.2135/gwardle@brighotnco.gov

City of Denver: First Creek

- \$500,000 to protect and enhance the First Creek riparian corridor including buffer around the stream, immediately upstream of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge.
- Contact: Gordon Robertson/720.913.0615/Gordon.Robertson@denvergov.org

City of Denver: Grant Frontier

- \$500,000 to restore and enhance riparian habitat on 1.75 miles of the South Platte River.
- Contact: Gordon Robertson/720.913.0615/Gordon.Robertson@denvergov.org

City of Denver: Heron Pond

- \$500,000 to create a 52-acre regional natural area on 20 acres of wetland and riparian habitat adjacent to the South Platte River. This will be Denver's first officially designated natural area.
- Contact: Gordon Robertson/720.913.0615/Gordon.Robertson@denvergov.org

Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership

- \$50,000 to remove invasive species along waterways surrounding the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge to improve the ecological health of regional waterways, in partnership with Mile High Youth Corps.
- Contact: Kate Cramer/303.468.3263/kkramer@sandcreekgreenway.org

City of Denver: Montbello Natural Area

- \$500,000 to acquire and preserve 5.5 acres of remnant prairie on the edges of an existing pond in the Montbello neighborhood one mile south of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge.
- Contact: Gordon Robertson/720.913.0615/Gordon.Robertson@denvergov.org

City of Commerce City: Sand Creek Project 1

- \$1.5 million to create additional riparian and upland habitat on a 12-acre site in a heavily industrialized area near the confluence of Sand Creek and the South Platte River to create additional riparian and upland habitat.
- Contact: Michelle Halstead/303.289.3719/Mhalstead@c3gov.com

City of Commerce City: Sand Creek Project 2

- \$1.1 million for a 20-acre industrial site to remediate vegetate and create new riparian and upland habitat near the confluence of Sand Creek and South Platte River
- Contact: Michelle Halstead/303-289-3719/Mhalstead@c3gov.com

City of Aurora: Triple Creek

- \$2 million to acquire 265 acres along the Triple Creek to protect and replace habitat and prevent future development as part of a long-term strategy to protect a key riparian corridor.
- Contact: Sherri Jo Stowell/303.739.7161/ssowell@auroragov.org

Fifteen more projects were submitted for funding from the \$17.4 million Recovery Fund. Project proposals underwent a preliminary assessment by the state agencies. Another round of applications is expected before awards are made in the next 12 to 24 months.

Background information and the full report are available at: www.northeastgreenwaycorridor.org.

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