

Fishers Canyon Open Space Master and Management Plan

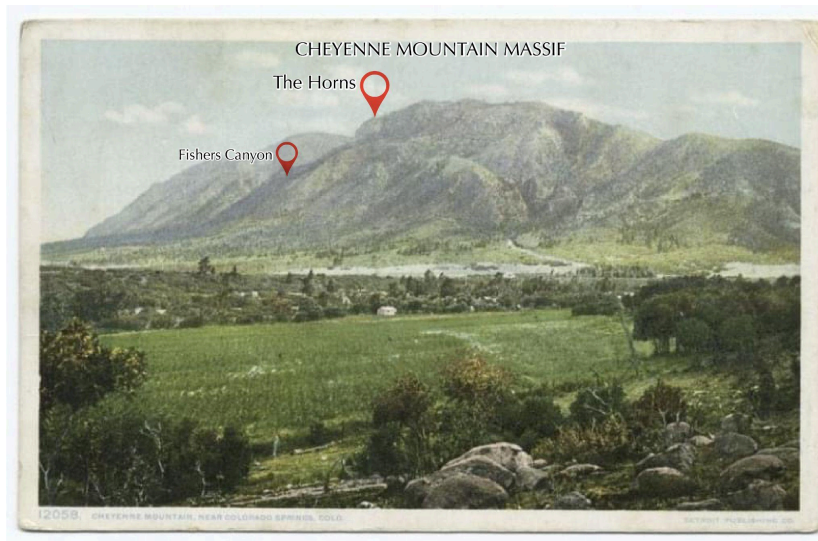
Frequently Asked Questions

Please see answers below to questions we have received to date about the project.

FAQs

What is the History of Fishers Canyon Open Space?

Fishers Canyon Open Space is scenically located on the eastern face of Cheyenne Mountain, between the Horns rock feature and eastern summit. Studded with ravines, granite cliff faces and a forested savanna, the property has welcomed wildlife, Native Americans and settlers over time. The site's canyon and open space bear the name of the original homesteader, Joshua Fisher. More recently slated for a housing project featuring over 70 homes, the [TOPS Program](#) and the [Conservation Fund](#) supported the acquisition of the property as protected open space for public enjoyment and natural conservation.



What are the Guidelines for Enhancing Open Space?

Taxpayer and grant funding has enabled the protection of Fishers Canyon Open Space, benefiting the surrounding neighbors and community by preserving scenic natural areas from development while providing management services including fire mitigation efforts. These funding sources and the rules governing Colorado Springs Open Space also have

requirements, or givens and guidelines, that represent the responsibilities of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department and provide the parameters for the decisions that will be made throughout the Fishers Canyon Open Space planning process. Project Givens will be established during the master plan process.

How will Fire and Safety concerns be addressed?

Several questions have been brought up from the community on how the City will provide access to Fishers Canyon Open Spaces while enforcing user safety rules and preventing unwanted human-caused fires.

As part of the current and previous funding requirements, the City must provide access to passive recreation to Fishers Canyon Open Space. This funding is critical to maintain the open space, help mitigate wildfire risk and restore habitat that will lead to better ecosystem health for the property. Balancing recreation access and habitat conservation is a dilemma communities across the Front Range are wrestling with. This topic will be on the agenda at the upcoming public meeting. Considerations below provide an understanding of current policy and different perspectives on this issue:

- Site Access
 - The City's open spaces are open only for day-use. Future access to Fishers Canyon will be controlled by a trailhead parking gate (see example photo below from Cottonwood Creek Park).
 - Additionally, seasonal trail closures may be part of the management plan for Fishers Canyon Open Space to protect habitat during raptor nesting season.
 - City staff utilize the three E's best practices (Trail Engineering, Education and Enforcement) to provide safe open space experiences on trails.



- Traffic and Parking

- A good number of community members have voiced desires to have enough parking at Fishers Canyon Open Space for access and to avoid guest parking in neighborhood streets during peak open space times like weekends. While many others are concerned that too much parking may cause crowding at the site.
 - Neighborhood members also have questions about what impact additional traffic may have on roads and emergency access.
 - A parking and traffic study is underway, although some analysis will be conducted after street snow and ice melts. Preliminary traffic assumptions and next steps in this analysis will be available at the upcoming public meeting.
- Fire Mitigation
 - Many citizens are concerned that allowing access to the site will increase the risk of unwanted human caused fires. Others contend that more visitation and a sustainable trail network will increase early detection of fire and improve access to first responders.
 - It is important to note that “wildland fire is an essential, natural process¹” and that due to impacts of recent drought, repressed natural wildland fire, and increasing temperatures, wildfires can be more frequent and intense.
 - The City does not currently permit controlled burns that replicate the natural process that would help reduce the fireload in Colorado landscapes. Other agencies including Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station and Fort Carson do use this best practice. The City uses other fire mitigation best practices.
 - Fortunately, as part of the City’s purchase of this property as open space, fire mitigation funds became available. To date, 89.3 acres of the open space underwent holistic wildfire mitigation including mastication, chipping harvesting, loading and hauling of fuel loads in 2023.
 - Fire mitigation reduces wildfire risk, protects critical infrastructure, reduces insurance premiums, prevents post-storm erosion, and conserves wildlife habitat and recreation resources.
 - As part of the Fishers Canyon Open Space Master and Management Plan process, planners have talked with several agencies who monitor and collaborate to ensure Fishers Canyon and Cheyenne Mountain are closely monitored and managed to prevent wildfires. Collaborating agencies monitoring the mountainside include:
 - Cheyenne Mountain Propagation Antenna Farm
 - Cheyenne Mountain Space Force Station
 - Cheyenne Mountain State Park
 - City of Colorado Springs Forestry and Parks Staff
 - Colorado Springs Fire Department
 - Fort Carson
 - US Forest Service

¹ National Wildfire Coordinating Group Communicator’s Guide for Wildland Fire Management: Fire Education, Prevention and Mitigation Practices.

- Additionally, the City has secured funding for an additional mitigation project, up to 20 acres, through 2025 from a grant that will employ a Youth Corps team to complete fuels mitigation with hand work.



Image Caption: Fishers Canyon Open Space after recent mitigation efforts cleared 89.3 acres of fuel load to reduce the intensity and risk of wildfires.