



**OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025
AGENDA**

Thursday, January 9, 2025 **5:30 PM** **100 Third St. Castle Rock, CO 80104**
BOCC Hearing Room
Instructions for virtually joining the meeting
can be found at:
<https://www.douglas.co.us/board-county-commissioners/boards-commissions/open-space-advisory-committee/>

The purpose of the Douglas County Open Space Advisory Committee is to advise and make recommendations to the Douglas County Board of County Commissioners (Board) and municipal officials regarding disbursement of funds from the Parks, Trails, Historic Resources, Open Space Sales and Use Tax Fund, and to select open space land to be proposed for acquisition, maintenance, or preservation, to establish priorities, and to make recommendations to the Board on lands involving conservation easements acquired with such funds.

CALL TO ORDER – 5:30 PM

- I. Roll Call**

- II. COSAC Disclosures**

- III. Adoption of Agenda**

- IV. Public comment (Provisions for additional public comment will be made as deemed appropriate by Chair)**

NEW BUSINESS

- V. External Funding Request – Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) – Proposal for Wildcat Regional Park – Monica Wasden, Board President, HRCA**

ADJOURN REGULAR MEETING

The Next Regular Meeting Will be Held on Thursday, February 6, 2025 @ 5:30 p.m.

Presentation to the Douglas County Open Space Advisory Committee (COSAC)

HRCA's Vision for the Wildcat Regional Park Property

January 9, 2025



HIGHLANDS RANCH
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Introduction to HRCA



Located just 12 miles south of Denver, the Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) is a **nationally award-winning, master-planned suburban community with more than 100,000 residents** in over 30,000 homes.

The community includes **four state-of-the-art recreation facilities** and offers a diverse array of annual classes, programs, and events, as well as 8,200 acres of Backcountry Wilderness Area and 2,200 acres of open space. All **designed to enhance living, playing, and enjoyment** of our 5,920-foot elevation with a **vibrant, versatile, and convenient environment**.

Residents of Highlands Ranch benefit from a **safe and engaging atmosphere** with **numerous amenities**, including exemplary schools, diverse entertainment and dining options, multiple service and retail hubs, medical centers, and houses of worship. The **community is active and socially engaged**, with neighbors frequently gathering for events and cultural attractions and volunteering for various causes.

Highlands Ranch **caters to everyone**, from young families and retirees to dog lovers, gardeners, golfers, business owners, and athletes. With 25 neighborhood parks, residents enjoy multi-use athletic fields, playgrounds, skate parks, nationally recognized tennis facilities, pickleball courts, two public golf courses, an extensive interconnected trail system, and a designated wilderness area.

No matter your age or stage in life, Highlands Ranch offers a **variety of living options and amenities** to suit your needs. Whether you're dealing with an empty nest, approaching retirement, or seeking a simpler lifestyle, Highlands Ranch has something for everyone.



Wildcat Regional Park Proposal Summary

The Wildcat Regional Park property is a **valuable natural asset** located in southeastern Highlands Ranch.

The Highlands Ranch Community Association (HRCA) is proposing to develop the Wildcat Regional Park property with an **emphasis on passive recreation, conservation, and wildlife preservation** in this beautiful open space and wilderness area, which will **benefit the community and preserve the environment**.

Our proposal is to build a **5K trail that will accommodate all, with benches to relax and enjoy the surrounding open space**. Also included is a **family picnic area and shade structure**. This 5K trail will provide for additional connectivity of the existing Douglas County east/west trail network to neighboring communities like Lone Tree, Castle Pines North, South Suburban, Parker, and Sterling Ranch/Chatfield, making it a true regional treasure.

Our proposal is centered on **preserving the natural beauty of the Wildcat property and protecting wildlife habitats**. By dedicating the park to wildlife preservation, passive recreation opportunities are realized.

Our proposal **emphasizes conservation**, safeguarding the existing ecosystems, including the significant elk population in the area.

This approach **aligns with community values** about the importance of maintaining open spaces while introducing a passive recreational system that future generations can enjoy.



Wildcat Regional Park Proposal Summary

We propose Douglas County **donate the Wildcat Regional Park land to HRCA and fund basic infrastructure** in the form of utilities and a vehicle rated (for emergency vehicles) pedestrian bridge onto the property.

HRCA would build passive recreation opportunities such as a 5K trail, which would be ADA accessible, benches, shade structures, and bike-only trails, which would be **open to all Douglas County residents**.



COSAC's Criteria for Recommending Approval

- ☑ **Property Conservation, Attributes, and Condition.** The rolling terrain, a defining geographic feature, offers visitors incredible views while maintaining the park's harmony with its surroundings. Recreation enhancements, including a 5k ADA-accessible trail and a designated bike-only trail, provide inclusive access to the park with minimal impact on the landscape. Sensitive to environmental needs, the park plan protects key wildlife migration routes and safeguards the neighboring Wildcat Mountain, where eagles nest. These limited improvements allow us to preserve the integrity of the native vegetation and natural terrain, creating a balanced experience for all to enjoy.
- ☑ **Partnerships.** There are opportunities to collaborate with organizations like the Douglas County School District and local race operators to host events that boost community engagement. These could include educational programs and 5K runs that make use of the park's trails, fostering environmental awareness and promoting stewardship practices. Through these initiatives, participants will enjoy valuable experiences while learning about conservation, effectively combining recreation with environmental stewardship.
- ☑ **Public Safety.** The Wildcat Regional Park will be designed with public safety and visitor experience at its core. The planned 5k trail, surfaced with crusher fines, will offer residents a well-maintained path to enjoy the park's natural beauty. At the trailhead, visitors will find amenities that enhance convenience and comfort, including parking, picnic shelters, and toilet vaults. Safety is further assured through regular patrols by HRCA Backcountry Staff, who bring extensive experience managing the nearby 8,200-acre backcountry. Proven fire mitigation procedures that protect that expansive area will be similarly implemented here, ensuring that the park remains safe for all Douglas County residents who come to enjoy this open space.



COSAC's Criteria for Recommending Approval

- ☑ **Public Accessibility and Population Use.** Developing the Wildcat property into a regional park offers numerous benefits for all Douglas County residents. It promotes physical health through recreational activities, supports mental well-being by providing access to nature, and helps maintain the area's environmental integrity. The project significantly meets the needs of diverse population sectors, including ADA accommodations for all ages, seniors, active youth, adults, schools, and clubs. It will also provide a pet-friendly environment, with specific enhancements to underscore ADA compliance throughout.
- ☑ **Cost of Funding.** The initial cost estimate is straightforward. Funding in the amount of \$5.4MM is being sought from the Open Space Fund, allowing other municipality initiatives to benefit from additional Park Funding, which preserves the quality of life for the entire community. Highlands Ranch receives no Shareback funding from Douglas County.
- ☑ **Historic and Cultural Resources.** Though absent of historic structures, Wildcat Regional Park holds deep cultural significance as part of the storied Highlands Ranch landscape. This land was once integral to the region's ranching heritage, echoing the traditions of the early ranchers who helped shape the community we know today. Preserving this open space honors those roots, creating a living connection to the legacy of the land while offering the community a vibrant natural area that reflects the historic character of Highlands Ranch.
- ☑ **Management and Maintenance Costs.** There will be no ongoing management or maintenance costs for Douglas County. HRCA is committed to sustainable management practices, ensuring the park's long-term health and accessibility. HRCA will cover these expenses, leaving no future obligations for the County. We have estimated these costs to be approximately \$300,000 per year.
- ☑ **Network of Preserved Open Spaces.** The proposal is comprehensive, focusing on a centrally located Regional Park with passive recreation and trails that connect with existing systems in neighboring entities and Douglas County, providing a seamless experience for visitors.



COSAC's Criteria for Recommending Approval

- ☑ **Wildlife Values and Critical Habitat.** The planned low impact use of the Wildcat Regional Park will protect wildlife corridors and natural drainageways. The trails will provide Douglas County residents with the ability to experience wildlife, native vegetation, and terrain in a natural setting while enjoying the incredible scenery.
- ☑ **Scenic Views from the Roadway.** Wildcat Regional Park boasts gently rolling terrain, bordered to the east by the majestic Wildcat Mountain and to the south by the natural expanse of the Backcountry Open Space. To the west, Griggs Road outlines the park, with breathtaking views of the Denver Front Range that unfold along the way. This setting preserves the native prairie grasses that blanket the terrain, allowing for minimal environmental impact and creating an inviting landscape that celebrates the natural beauty of Highlands Ranch.
- ☑ **Educational Research.** The 202-acres of open space offer an invaluable resource for environmentally respectful recreational activities. We've designed an ADA-accessible 5K trail and designated bike trails to meet our community's evolving needs while promoting a love for the outdoors. Our project focuses on combining sustainability with recreation to enhance quality of life for everyone, creating a hands-on learning environment that serves as a natural classroom for environmental education.



In Summary...

1. Our proposal **emphasizes the importance of ecological integrity**. We are dedicated to building a park that stands as a regional hallmark, showcasing the values of conservation, recreation, and community partnerships.
2. Our proposal stands **firmly focused on preserving the natural beauty of the Wildcat property by championing wildlife habitats**. This Regional Park concept prioritizes conservation efforts that celebrate and protect the existing ecosystems, including the significant elk population that inhabits the area.
3. Our proposal **makes a statement that aligns with community values** regarding the importance of maintaining our open spaces.
4. Our proposal for the conveyance of the Wildcat property to HRCA represents not just a land transfer, but a **commitment to all Douglas County residents** for responsible recreational expansion.
5. We are **requesting that COSAC support and recommend conveyance of the Wildcat property to HRCA** for the development of a **conservation-focused regional park** open to all Douglas County residents.



Thank you

Thank you for supporting our proposal.



HIGHLANDS RANCH
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION