

Parker Jordan Open Space

**New 80-Acre Section of Cherry Creek Natural Habitat
Will Open to the Public**

As early as next summer, more than 80 acres of formerly private open space land along Cherry Creek in the City of Centennial – some of it homesteaded in 1864 - will open for the first time to hikers, runners, cyclists, naturalists and other outdoors enthusiasts.

The site, to be known as Parker Jordan Open Space, will provide one of the last missing pieces of a permanent regional trail in a 40-mile stretch from Confluence Park in lower downtown Denver to Castlewood Canyon State Park in Douglas County.

Planning is underway for alignment and construction of a new section of the Cherry Creek Regional Trail following purchase of the property by the Parker Jordan Metropolitan District for \$2.18 million in September from the family of Joanne Dransfeldt Fetters and John Fetters Jr., which has owned and farmed the land since 1939. The property was annexed by Centennial in 2006.

Open Space Protection

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“We are extremely pleased to make this beautiful area with both natural and historical significance open to the public,” said District Board President Norman Sheldon. “The Board considers this purchase the most significant open space protection effort in Arapahoe County and the City of Centennial in the past 50 years.”

“Parker Jordan Metropolitan District understands the value of ecologically supporting the open space while making it available to public use,” said John Fetters. “Their foresight in providing for stream improvements motivated our family to proceed with the sale of the property.”

Parker Jordan Open Space is located immediately south of Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park, a 75-acre educational nature park at 7600 E. Jasper Ct. in Centennial. The District initiated the process that led to final approval of the Park's design and was a principal funding partner in its construction. Construction of the Park is the result of a partnership that began in 2000 between the District and Arapahoe County, and the Park is owned and maintained by the County. The combined area of the Park and Parker Jordan Open Space covers 155 acres of contiguous open space.

Acquisition of the Parker Jordan Open Space was recognized with an award to the District presented by Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners and accepted by District President Sheldon and Secretary-Treasurer Don Leyn on Nov. 4 at a conference sponsored by CCSP, Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority and the Colorado Chapter of the American Public Works Association.

"It is impossible to reduce to words what the acquisition of the Parker Jordan Open Space means to neighbors and friends of Cherry Creek," said Casey Davenport of the Stewardship Partners in presenting the award.

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Improvements

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The District plans storm drainage and trail improvements and amenities to be constructed in conjunction with other agencies, organizations, businesses and local governments. These entities may include Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority, Arapahoe County Water and Wastewater Authority, Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners, Tagawa Gardens, the City of Centennial and Arapahoe County. Funds for additional improvements will be sought through grants from these entities and other sources.

The District has begun working with consultants on the design of improvements including the regional trail extension, anticipated to be ready next summer. The trail will accommodate cycling, running, jogging, hiking, walking and other pedestrian uses.

Additional plans, slated for bidding and construction beginning in 2011, may include low-impact secondary and tertiary trail routes guiding pedestrians to picnic areas, gathering spaces, and seating areas to enjoy the outdoors with natural habitat educational and interpretive signage to learn about the site and the region.

The new Parker Jordan Open Space area straddles and includes 1.4 miles of Cherry Creek between Parker and Jordan Roads south of Broncos Parkway. Its southern boundary is the 17 Mile House Farm Park located in south Arapahoe County.

Rich, Natural Habitat

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The natural habitat area includes the meandering Creek with the sounds of riffle drops of water over rock, open meadows, heavily wooded areas, old trees and fallen logs. Its inhabitants include deer, raccoon, fox, skunks, coyotes, blue-crowned heron, swainson's and red-tail hawks, occasional nesting bald eagles and crawdads in the Creek waters. Vegetation includes the native boxelder trees, wild plum, chokecherry bushes, willow trees, cottonwood and hops.

Effects of past flooding, particularly the life-claiming Flood of 1965, are visible along with shifts in the Creek channel where specimens of petrified wood also can be found.

Local History

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Adjacent to the area is the old homestead compound including the oldest building, a white barn built circa 1900. Homesteaded in 1864 by Marx Kearns, additions to the site eventually comprised 1,300 acres. Kearns not only farmed the land but owned wagon teams of show horses that he also used for farm labor.

Cherokee Trail passed through the site and Indians were seen using the Creek until the 1930s. The Colorado Historical Society also has found oxen shoes on the land.

The name "Vermilion Creek" (now known as Cherry Creek) was used by trappers during Colorado's Gold Rush period of the mid-1800s due either to a reddish-orange color of Creek algae in the fall months or to chokecherry berries of the same color that grew along the Creek.

Before 1900, a fort-like barn on the west side of the Creek was used as a gathering place by families during threats of Indian attacks.

Ownership of the homestead eventually passed on to one of Kearns' daughters, Lena, and her husband, Ed Pouppirt, a businessman who rented farms to families throughout Cherry Creek Valley. Following Pouppirt's death, Lena asked Jensine and Lewis Kragelund, property renters who had immigrated from Denmark, to purchase her homestead. The Kragelunds, grandparents of Joanne Fetters, purchased the property in 1939.

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Regional Trail Connections

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The Cherry Creek Regional Trail will connect south from Parker Jordan Open Space to the 17 Mile House Farm Park, a working farm and weigh station in the late 1800s that marked 17 miles to the intersection of Colfax Avenue and Broadway in Denver. Key to connecting north to the Cherry Creek Regional Trail is completion of the Broncos Parkway Trailhead at the northeast corner of Parker Jordan Open Space and the southeast corner of Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park. The District plans to complete the Trailhead in 2010 concurrent with completion of the new Regional Trail.

Project design for Parker Jordan Open Space is being conducted by J3 Engineering Consultants with Valerian LLC and includes hydraulic, structural, environmental, sociological and regulatory factors.