



City of Westminster Parks, Recreation and Libraries (PRL) mission statement: *“Together we create exceptional opportunities for a vibrant community with a commitment to nature, wellness, and literacy.”*

Westy Dog Park Guardians mission statement: *“To be a responsible community partner with the City of Westminster.”*



## Westy Dog Park Guardians WHOS Dog Park Research and Recommendations

The Westy Dog Park Guardians is a grassroots organization that was established in January 2024 with the goal of preserving and protecting the Westminster Hills Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park (WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park). The Guardians have worked tirelessly as a pack to gather, analyze, summarize, substantiate, and present the information about WHOS to the community and to Westminster’s elected government. These efforts have been compiled into the Guardians’ Research and Recommendations (GRR). The Guardians respectfully submit GRR to the Honorable Mayor Nancy McNally, Mayor Pro Tem Sarah Nurmela, and the Westminster City Council for their consideration and approval.

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# Introduction

The purpose of this Westy Dog Park Guardians WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park Research and Recommendations (GRR) document is to request that the City Council of Westminster:

1. Acknowledge, affirm, and protect the current 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park that has existed for dog owners and their dogs since 2000, and at its current size since 2009, confirming that the area is intended for active off-leash dog use by dog owners; and<sup>i</sup>
2. Collaborate with the Westy Dog Park Guardians and community stakeholders to increase the stewardship of, and improve the conditions at, the beloved WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, which will optimize this regional economic asset and address the concerns of Westminster Parks, Recreation & Libraries (PRL) that WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is being “negatively impacted by overuse.”<sup>ii</sup>

The Westy Hills Dog Park Guardians offer a summary of research that demonstrates:

1. Substantial public support to retain the off-leash dog park at its current size;
2. Residents of the Denver Metro Area love their dogs, and recreation with their dogs is of utmost importance to them;
3. The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park amounts to approximately 6.4% of the 6,600 acres of parks and open space enjoyed by the dog lovers of Westminster and surrounding communities, and it has been marketed, developed, managed, and used for at least two recreational activities, off-leash dog use and cycling use, for at least 24 years;
4. Questions and concerns about the data provided in the ERO Westminster Hills Open Space Conditions Report<sup>iii</sup>;
5. The unique restorative contributions of dogs to people;
6. The importance of exercise to brain health and mental health;
7. The value of a space dedicated to diverse people and dogs recreating together naturally; and
8. A list of potential solutions to the concerns raised by PRL.

We are asking to work **together** with the City Council and PRL on the care and stewardship of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park because:

- 89.8% of the respondents to Community Feedback Survey 2 want to retain the 420 acres at Westminster Hills as an off-leash dog park;
- Coloradans love their dogs, dog parks are a very small portion of PRL resources, and dog owners are likely underserved by PRL resources;
- Dogs are likely not the exclusive cause of the PRL issues of concern;
- Dogs serve people in unique and important ways, and they also deserve to exercise;
- Exercise is important to people’s physical and mental health;
- This is an opportunity for the City of Westminster to provide and enjoy the recreational and economic benefits of serving dog lovers;
- We care about our neighbors and we seek to find solutions to the impacts weekend dog park use causes in the neighborhoods that surround the park;

- Upon completion of the Indiana bridge, the Greenway Trail will become an important route for regional cyclists. With Broomfield withdrawing from the project, the Trail is scheduled to be rerouted through Westminster property in the western portion of WHOS. This is a critical opportunity for a long-term solution by updating the reroute to a path along the southern border of WHOS; a plan met with preliminary positive feedback from Bike Jeffco; and

Dog owners who exercise with their dogs at WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park also love nature, the environment, and our experiences in them, and we want to collaborate on solutions and continued stewardship of the park. We are an extremely engaged population with a strong desire to improve the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.



# Results of Community Feedback

PRL has conducted three public surveys: the Visitor Survey in summer 2023 (Survey 1), the Community Feedback Survey that was open to the public through February 15, 2024 (Survey 2), and the Management Options Survey open to the public March 6-March 24, 2024 (Survey 3).

**Survey 1**, which, although no numbers are provided by the PRL graph (slide 34 of Visitor Survey results on PRL website), appear to show that some **70% of respondents would be extremely dissatisfied or dissatisfied with any reduction to the off-leash dog area.**<sup>iv</sup>

The **Survey 2** data is very similar to data collected from Survey 1, although no results are reported on the City of Westminster website. Our analysis of Survey 2, as categorized by the four options presented on the new Survey 3, shows that out of **883 responses**, the public supports:

- **Option 1 - No change to the size of the off-leash area – 89.8% (793)**
- Option 2 - Off-leash area larger than 33 acres but smaller than 400 acres - **2.7% (24)**
- Option 3 - Conditions assessment recommendation of reducing off leash area to 33 acres - **2.8% (25)**
- Option 4 - Eliminate off-leash at WHOS and create more off-leash dog parks throughout the city - **2.5% (22)**
- Comments recorded but n/a to any category - **2.2% (19)**<sup>v</sup>

During the March 6, 2024 Public Meeting, PRL referred to the data from Survey 2. PRL provided information that 47% of respondents wanted no change to the size of the off-leash area and had no other percentages to report. PRL used this inaccurate and incomplete information to develop a new survey, the WHOS Area Management Options survey - Survey 3 - posted to the PRL website on March 6, 2024.

The Survey 3 data continues to show strong support for “no change to the size of the off-leash area” with 78% of respondents indicating support or strong support.<sup>vi</sup>

To summarize the results of community feedback regarding the PRL plans to significantly reduce or eliminate off-leash dog use at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, from surveys conducted by PRL in the last year, **the responses showed an overwhelming average of almost 80% wanting to retain full off-leash dog use at the park**, specifically:

- **Survey 1: 70%** of respondents would be extremely dissatisfied or dissatisfied with any reduction to the off-leash dog area;
- **Survey 2: 89.8% (883 respondents)** support no change to the size of the off-leash area; and
- **Survey 3: 78%** of respondents indicate support or strong support for no change to the size of the off-leash area.

Another indicator of the will of the people is the **Change.org Petition** supporting the retention of the entire 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, which currently has over **8,000 signatures.**<sup>vii</sup>

# Coloradans Love Their Dogs

In Denver, there are more dogs than children,<sup>viii</sup> and 27.1% of Colorado households have a dog.<sup>ix</sup> Coloradans love their dogs so much, they ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in a study examining which dog owners spoil their dogs the most.<sup>x</sup> Coloradans value their relationships with their dogs so much that 46% report hosting a celebration for and with their dogs; 43.2% report taking their dog to dog-friendly activities; and 41.3% take their dog on vacation with them.<sup>xi</sup>

A recent survey by Rover and Zillow showed that Denver tops the list for dog-friendly cities because dog owners put their dog's well-being at or near the top of their criteria for deciding where to relocate.<sup>xii</sup> Being home with our dogs during the pandemic strengthened our already considerable bonds with our dogs. Among dog owners who were surveyed, 86% reported that dog-friendly amenities were a factor in determining where to move.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Westminster Dog Parks

In addition to WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, there are only two other dog parks in Westminster, The Big Dry Creek Dog Park (no acreage listed, but it is within the 18-acre Big Dry Creek Park) and The Little Dry Creek Dog Park (1.75 acres).<sup>xiv</sup> The difference between the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park and the Big Dry Creek Dog Park and The Little Dry Creek Dog Park is that dog owners can exercise alongside their dogs, and their dogs can exercise at their own pace, at WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.

**The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is approximately 6.4% of the 6,600 acres of parks and open space enjoyed by the dog lovers of Westminster and surrounding communities.** WHOS is also enjoyed by folks who walk, run, and cycle without dogs.

Although the Westminster Hills Open Space area may have been purchased with a specific use in mind, **the 420-acre East side has been devoted to off-leash dog use for 24 years**, beginning in 2000, and at its current size since 2009.<sup>xv</sup> By comparison, there are over 150 miles of multi-use trails in Westminster, which are enjoyed by cyclists, runners, and walkers.<sup>xvi</sup>

The results of three public surveys, the considerable support expressed at the March 6, 2024 Public Meeting, and the continuous advocacy demonstrated by the Guardians since January 2024, when most park users became aware of the PRL plans to greatly limit or eliminate off-leash use at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, suggest that dog owners who wish to exercise with their off-leash dogs may be an underserved population. The City of Westminster can seize this opportunity to improve our crown jewel, the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.

Engaging the public has revealed a considerable desire for this population to recreate in spaces like the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. Westminster should consider the creation of another similar dog park, in order to serve this part of the community, and expand the economic rewards that would come with an expansion of off-leash dog parks for dog lovers who spend time and money in Westminster.

# Economic Benefits of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park

Local businesses saw a dramatic loss of revenue when Standley Lake was closed to recreational, trailered boating. Based on the information provided by the City of Westminster and Jefferson County, the Westy Dog Park Guardians believe any reduction in size to the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park will have similar results.

According to the PRL slide deck, the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park attracts nearly one million visitors per year.

As stated in the Jefferson County “Colorado Federal Lands Access Program” proposal for Greenway Trail funding, they estimated 120,500 annual visitations representing “\$9,629,556 per year in direct local economic activity (US Fish and Wildlife Service, Banking on Nature, 2013. Recreation expenditures, non-consumptive activities, adjusted for FWS Region 6, assuming 66% local visitation and 34% non-local visitation).” This comes out to \$79.91 per visitor (9,629,556/120,500).<sup>xvii</sup>

By extrapolating these numbers, the 1 million yearly visitors to WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park would create a nearly \$80 million direct economic benefit for the Westminster community. While the Guardians believe this number is inflated, there is evidence of large economic benefit for drawing visitors from outside the neighborhood. For comparison’s sake, using the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Banking on Nature, 2017, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge reported 868,900 total recreation visits resulting in \$24,247,400 in total economic output.

Based on results from the Standley Lake boating closure and recreation numbers supplied by local agencies, it is apparent the western-Westminster economy will suffer should there be a significant reduction in WHOS Dog Park visitation.

## Use of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park

Westminster Hills Open Space was acquired through twelve different open space purchases beginning in 1988 with the purchase of the 400-acre Colorado Hills Property, followed by the purchase of 125 acres in 1995 from the Brauch Family. More land was purchased over several years including the addition of Woman Creek Reservoir Property in 2017, which is 345 acres. Westminster Hills Open Space is now roughly 1,000 acres. This open space was acquired using over \$4.5 million from the Westminster Parks Open Space and Trails’ (POST) funds and more than \$4.7 million from Natural Resources Damages and Department of Energy Funds and grants from Jefferson County and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO).<sup>xviii</sup>

For 24 years, the City of Westminster has advertised and marketed the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park to dog owners in the Denver Metro Area, via park signage and the PRL website.<sup>xix</sup>

The PRL swapped out the signs, removing the references to the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park in 2023. Below is a history of WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park signage collected from Google Images.



# PRL Signage at WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park

## Signs – Simms Parking lot

- October 2007 – Sign is illegible in this photograph



- July 2012 - Sign says “Westminster Hills Dog Park”



## November 2018 - Sign Says “Westminster Hills Dog Park”



- February 2022 - Sign says “Westminster Hills Dog Park”



- June 2023 – Current Sign says “Westminster Hills Open Space”



Signs – 100<sup>th</sup> Ave Parking lot

- This lot was constructed after Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail was built in 2016
- July 2015



- November 2018 - Sign says “Westminster Hills Open Space Dog Park & Greenway Trail”



- August 2019 - Sign says “Westminster Hills Open Space Dog Park & Greenway Trail”



- September 2021 - Sign says “Westminster Hills Open Space Dog Park & Greenway Trail”



- June 2023 – Current Sign says “Westminster Hills Open Space & Greenway Trail”



# Management of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park

The PRL, on the WHOS Area Management Plan website, acknowledges that: “The land was acquired to protect the environment and offer passive recreation as designated open space. The off-leash dog area was initially a small pilot project added in 2000 that expanded to its current size of over 400 acres due to its popularity. Per the Westminster Municipal Code, lands acquired with open space funds shall be preserved and managed in a natural condition (W.M.C. 13-5-3(A)).”<sup>xx</sup>

Multiple sections of the Westminster Municipal Code are relevant to the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park:

Section 13-5-3(A) of the Westminster Municipal Code states “**Generally**, lands acquired with open space funds shall be preserved and managed in a natural condition.” It also states that: “Open spaces will generally be open for passive public use and enjoyment, and trails will be developed where possible to provide access. Examples of compatible passive recreation include hiking, nature study and photography.” (Emphasis added).<sup>xxi</sup>

Section 13-5-3(B) states: “Additional activities that may be allowed on certain open space property, or portions thereof, after the City Manager determines such activities will not have a detrimental effect on the natural qualities for which the open space was originally acquired, include fishing, biking, horseback riding, boating, and the development of off-leash dog exercise areas, restrooms, trailhead parking lots, and limited structures that enhance the passive recreational experience.”<sup>xxii</sup>

Section 13-5-7 states: “The Department of Parks, Recreation and Libraries shall be responsible for the regular maintenance and operation of the open space properties, with funds made available in the City's general operating budget and funds derived from the open space portion of the parks, open space and trails sales tax.”

Section 13-5-4(A) states that “In certain cases, it may be determined by the City Council that a property originally acquired for open space purposes may be better utilized for another public purpose, including, but not limited to, **an active park.**” (Emphasis added).<sup>xxiii</sup>



## xxiv Actual Use of the Park

The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park has not been managed as purely open space used for only passive recreation activities since 2000. The City of Westminster has marketed and provided dog owners and their dogs with an active recreation space for 24 years. It has also developed, provided, and marketed the Rocky Mountain Greenway Bike Trail, a dirt road that can support vehicle traffic, for bike use for 8 years. For over two decades, the PRL has promoted, marketed, further developed, and managed the use of at least two recreational activities that are not listed as passive activities, off-leash dog use and cycling use, at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.<sup>xxv</sup>

Westminster Hills Open Space consists of 1,027 acres of prairie that includes The Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail that “crosses through the Property from the southeast to northwest, while multiple other roads, trails, and social trails provide visitor and dog access through the prairie.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

“With over 150 miles of multi-use trails within Westminster, there's no shortage of outdoor opportunities. There are 50 individual trails within the system, composed of concrete, gravel, natural, and multi-surface materials. There are 5 regional trails, which are great for commuting and recreational use. The regional trails are Big Dry Creek Trail (Westminster's National Recreation Trail), Farmers' High Line Canal Trail, Little Dry Creek Trail, Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail, and the U.S. 36 Bikeway. These trails have been established along ditches and canals that were preserved as wildlife corridors, but they also provide access for trail users to observe a little bit of peace and serenity in an ever-growing metropolitan area.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park portion of the Rocky Mountain Greenway Bike Trail begins at the Westminster Hills Parking lot on 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue and dissects both the 420-acre Off-Leash Dog Park, as well as the western remainder of the 1,027 acres of the Open Space. It also nearly subdivides the Historic Burrowing Owl Nest site, depicted on page 25 of the ERO Conditions Report, in the 607-acre western portion of the Open Space.<sup>xxviii</sup> Bike trail development and cyclist use have an impact on the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, yet this impact is not addressed by the ERO Westminster Hills Open Space Conditions Report. The Rocky Mountain Greenway Bike Trail could have been routed entirely along the southern boundary of the 1,027 acres of open space. Instead, it was routed through the center of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.

While preparing for the forthcoming opening of the Indiana bridge connecting the Greenway Trail to Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge, it became apparent the current formation of the Trail is unsustainable. We strongly recommend rerouting the Greenway Trail along the existing, newly constructed, concrete path west through the dog park and connect to existing trails around Mower Reservoir. These plans have been presented to Bike Jeffco and have received preliminary positive feedback. This reroute will be advantageous due to:

- Broomfield withdrawing from the project requiring the western section to be rerouted.
- While PRL has stated the current reroute will not disturb the burrowing owls, the noted nesting is exactly where the current reroute is scheduled to occur. The Guardians' new map leaves the nesting area completely undisturbed.
- Greatly reduces the chance for cycle/dog interaction by routing cyclists along the park perimeter.
- Allows cyclists the opportunity to enjoy a Westminster hidden gem, Mower Reservoir, on their ride.

Below is a brief review of the history of the two active uses, off-leash dog use and cycling use:

- Off-leash dog use has existed for 24 years, beginning in 2000 and at its current 420-acre size since 2009;
- Cycling use was allowed during this time, but it was greatly enhanced when the Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail that subdivides the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park was completed in 2016. That amounts to 8 years of use.
- Off-leash dog use preceded Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail cycling use by 15 years.
- While the legal theory of nuisance does not apply because the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is public land, “a nuisance is an invasion of another's use and enjoyment of his real property.”<sup>xxxix</sup> The initial PRL plan reducing the off-leash area to 33 acres eliminates 24 years of off-leash dog access.

## PRL Overuse Argument

Of the 1,027 acres, some portion of the 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park has existed since 2000.<sup>xxx</sup> The PRL states that “the off-leash dog area is a regional attraction, providing a unique opportunity for dog owners to walk, hike, or run with their dog through an open prairie setting. This use, however, has resulted in a proliferation of social trails, vegetation trampling, native plant degradation, and concerns about contamination from dog waste (E. coli).”<sup>xxxi</sup> Throughout this process, the PRL has failed to account for impacts on the land due to the construction of the Rocky Mountain Greenway Bike Trail, nor use by cyclists. They simply argue that environmental degradation is caused by off-leash dogs.

The PRL heard from long-time citizens at the March 6, 2024 Public Meeting that the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park has been transformed from a cow pasture to the current open prairie, and some users report that the current conditions are healthier than when the land was purchased. The public also questioned blaming off-leash dogs for conditions that may be caused by, or exacerbated by, climate change.

The PRL argues that the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park “is being loved to death,”<sup>xxxii</sup> and “the current management strategy for Westminster Hills is unable to sustain resource demands from high visitation to the Property.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> The PRL is arguing that the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is suffering from overuse. The Guardians argue that conditions at the Park are likely also impacted by climate change, bike trail development, cycling use, and that the Park is suffering from mismanagement.



## WHOS Dog Park Timeline/History

- 3/2000 - 40 acres off-leash trial
- 3/2001 - 40 acres off-leash approval
- 3/2008 - 1000 acres off-leash approval
- 3/2009 - 440 acres off-leash approval
- 11/2014 - Open Space Stewardship Plan adopted requiring annual clean up days
- 4/2016 – Greenway Trail public meeting
- 6/2016 – Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail completed through Off-Leash Dog Park. Greenway Trail is a planned 80-mile bicycle route connecting Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge to Two Ponds National Wildlife Refuge to Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge to Rocky Mountain National Park near Estes Park.
- 6/2016 - 100th Ave dirt parking lot installed
- 1/2017 - Last scheduled Westy clean-up day (required annually by Stewardship Plan)
- 6/2017 - 100th Ave paved parking lot installed
- 5/2018 - Joe Reale becomes Open Space Superintendent<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- 6/2020 - Fence built along west off-leash boundary at Alkire
- 10/2020 - Broomfield withdraws from Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail<sup>xxxv</sup>
- 1/2022 - Tomás Herrera-Mishler becomes Director of Parks, Recreation, and Libraries<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- 4/2022 - Some trash cans and poop bag dispensers removed
- 6/2022 - Trail barricades constructed
- 11/2022 - Mark Freitag becomes City Manager<sup>xxxvii</sup>
- 6/2023 - Dog Park signs changed to Open Space only, removal of Dog Park
- 6/2023 - Westy Survey #1 conducted
- 7/2023 - Grading for paved concrete bike path begins
- 11/2023 - Paved concrete bike path and new fencing completed
- 11/2023 - Public meeting - off-leash reduction only option presented
- 11/2023 - Survey #1 results posted online (70% keep size as-is)
- 1/2024 - ERO Conditions Report completed
- 1/2024 - "Open House"- off-leash reduction only option presented
- 1/2024 - City begins using "We're early in the process, this is only one option being looked at"
- 1/2024 - Westy Dog Park Guardians founded
- 2/2024 - Survey #2 completed and comments posted online. Results never posted by City.
- 3/2024 - Public Meeting. Options given were cherry-picked out of Survey #2 responses.
- 3/2024 - Survey #3 opened and CAT formation
- 3/2024 - Survey #3 results posted (79% keep size as-is)
- 3/2024 - Guardians reported actual results of Survey #2 to City Council (90% keep size as-is)
- 3/2024 - CAT meetings begin
- 5/2024 - CAT process completed with no consensus and no report



# WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is Safe and Accessible for Diverse Park Users

The City of Westminster 2022-2023 Revised Strategic Plan provides the following Vision Statement - “Westminster is a city of beautiful, safe, well-maintained neighborhoods and destinations with a vibrant, diverse economy, rich and resilient environment and a strong sense of community and belonging.” It also contains the following Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Guiding Principle - “Achieve equitable processes for the people of Westminster by providing opportunity for all voices to be heard and drawing upon community diversity in decision making.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Since its inception in January 2024, and the considerable community engagement undertaken by our grassroots advocacy group, the Westy Dog Park Guardians have heard from numerous users of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park that it is:

- a uniquely safe space for seniors, single women, and LGBTQIA+ populations walking or running with their dogs; and
- a uniquely accessible place for disabled users and folks with strollers and children to exercise with their dogs without the need for leashing them.

This diverse group of park users does not experience the sense of safety and well-being provided by the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park in any other setting where they could walk their dogs on-leash. The Park also provides community and a strong sense of belonging between a diverse population of dog lovers.

## The Importance of Exercise to Human Well-being

Exercise improves both brain health and mental well-being. All citizens, including dog owners, deserve the means to exercise. Below are highlights of key research study results.

Exercise benefits the brain in three ways: it enhances blood and oxygen flow; it elevates the levels of key neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine); and it stimulates the production of brain cell building blocks, especially Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor (BDNF).

The benefits of exercise to brain health, mood, and stress resilience include:

1. Protecting against the negative impacts of aging and stress;
2. Increasing brain volume in areas responsible for learning, memory, and cognitive function, via the birth of new brain cells;
3. Improving the health and functioning of brain cells, including the capacity for forming neural networks, which likely explains why exercise improves cognitive function;
4. Raising antioxidant levels, which helps protect against oxidative stress;
5. Increasing neurotropic factors, including BDNF;
6. Restoring stress arousal to a resilient level, which improves current mood and brain function, and prepares the brain for processing stressful events;

7. Reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress;
8. Regulating the fight-or-flight stress response;
9. Reducing inflammation and oxidative stress; and
10. Improving self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social support.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## The Unique Contributions of Dogs to People

The benefits of interactions between humans and animals have captured the interest of researchers for years. Animal-assisted interventions involve the use of animals to help people in settings such as schools, libraries, hospitals, assisted living facilities, courts, prisons, offices, and trauma scenes. The most studied species is dogs. Research shows that dogs benefit people by reducing their stress, lowering their blood pressure, reducing their heart rate, and improving their mood, happiness, loneliness, and cognitive capacity.

Below are highlights of key research study results.

Dogs make very special, unique, and important contributions to humans. Interacting with dogs:

1. Reduces stress hormones;
2. Lowers heart rate and blood pressure;
3. Increases the bonding and attachment neurotransmitter oxytocin;
4. Improves stress, happiness, loneliness, and negative emotions;
5. Enhances executive function, responsible for motivation, concentration, planning, prioritizing, emotion regulation, and the capacity to understand different points of view;
6. Improves metacognition, the ability to understand your own thinking; and
7. Increases brain activation in the prefrontal cortex, dedicated to executive functions, such as attention, working memory, and problem-solving, as well as social and emotional processing.<sup>xi</sup>

## Enhancing the Health of Humans and Dogs, Together

The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, described as the crown jewel of Westminster by people who love to exercise there with their dogs, is strategically important to the City, and of utmost significance to its dog-loving citizens. It provides the exceptional opportunity for people and dogs to exercise in natural ways, together.

Aging dogs have brains that are similar to aging people. They have a comparable metabolism, suffer from the development of beta-amyloid plaques implicated in Alzheimer's disease, and are large enough to study with neuroimaging. Researchers monitored the brain health of 43 middle-aged beagles for 3 years (36 females and all 6 years at the start of the study). They were examining the potential of 2 drugs targeting Alzheimer's disease. All the dogs, in both the treatment group and the control group, received daily exercise, playtime with dogs of the same gender, and playtime with a rotating group of toys.

Typical aging in dogs and humans causes shrinking in the hippocampus, the brain structure involved in memory and emotion and that is exceptionally sensitive to age-related decline. All the dogs in the

study, both treatment and control, experienced a 1.74% increase in hippocampus volume every year of the study. The drugs had no impact on the dog's brains.

Researchers believe that the daily social interaction from dogs playing together, physical exercise, and environmental enrichment from playing with toys, led to the increase in hippocampus volume. These activities increase blood flow, enhance the birth of new brain cells, and are likely to be protective against age-related declines. People's brain health is likely to benefit from routine social interaction, exercise, and enriching activities.<sup>xii</sup>

The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park provides the exact environment for regular exercise and interaction for dog lovers, and for our dogs, that promotes successful aging in citizens and their dogs.

Traditional dog park models do not offer the same opportunities due to their size and congestion. Westy Dog Park Guardians propose that the City of Westminster could increase its dedication to serving this population, and to reap the economic benefits that would expand as dog lovers spend time and money here, by developing a second large acreage for a second large off-leash dog park.



# Environmental Concerns

## Background Information

### Brief History

The Westminster Hills Open Space and Off-Leash Dog Park (WHOS) consists of 1,027 acres of rolling hills and open lands purchased with funds from the Open Space Program. This program was initially created by voters in 1985 and approved  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 1% of sales tax funds to be dedicated for the purchase of open space lands. Funds have also been obtained from the Department of Energy as well as grants from Jefferson County.

1. **Acquisition:** The initial acreage of the current WHOS area began with the purchase of 425.5 acres in 1988. The most recent acquisition was a 14-acre parcel in 2022.
2. **History:** the lands, which now comprise the 1,027 acreage, were used for agricultural purposes including cattle grazing leases. Cattle were regularly seen on portions of the WHOS acreage until 2010. Prairie dog colonies were also prevalent throughout the land as noted in the 2009 image below.
3. **Dog Park:** the citizens of Westminster were instrumental in obtaining access to the land for use as an off-leash dog park as early as 1999. The current 420 acre off-leash access has been in place since 2009. The dog park has become known as one of the largest dog parks in the United States.
4. **The Rocky Mountain Greenway Trail (RMGT):** was completed in 2016 and travels through the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. The RMGT is a partnership between local governments, the State of Colorado, the Department of the Interior, and other agencies. The intent of the RMGT is to reconnect residents of the region with the outdoors.

### Management

The 2014 Open Space Stewardship Plan was designed to provide a comprehensive management plan for the City of Westminster's Open Spaces. The Plan was designed to identify management responsibilities, associated costs, needed resources, and future projected capital improvements. Although the 2014 Plan identified numerous goals and specifications, few have been implemented or visible at WHOS.

### Transitional Landscape

PRL has identified WHOS as a transitional landscape, defined as areas which include sites undergoing restoration or sites scheduled for restoration and/or enhancement. This is a temporary designation until site improvements can be completed. Since 2014, there has been no reclassification of the WHOS area as no specific site improvements have been identified or completed.

## Destination Facility

WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is defined as very popular and is considered a regional or “destination facility” that attracts users living outside of Westminster. No accommodations have been implemented to address the impacts of regional use and the increased local populations.

## Current State of WHOS Habitat and Wildlife

### Shortgrass Prairie

According to the ERO Conditions Report, WHOS consists of 1,027 acres of rolling prairie, with the predominant ecoregion categorized as shortgrass and mixed grass prairie.<sup>xlii</sup> The WHOS prairie is partially fragmented. It is contiguous with Standley Lake Regional Park to the south and Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge to the west, and the property is fragmented by high density housing and the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport to the north and east.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) published a "State Wildlife Action Plan" (SWAP)<sup>xliii</sup> in 2015 to serve as guidance for the conservation of wildlife and habitats throughout the state of Colorado. Chapter 3 of this plan discusses the shortgrass prairie habitat and states: “Today, nearly 50% of our historic shortgrass prairie has been converted to row crop agriculture or other uses – the largest loss of any of Colorado’s habitats.” Threats for continued loss and fragmentation of the shortgrass prairie include domestic livestock grazing, energy production, continuing expansion of urban communities, and changing climate conditions. The map below depicts the presence of habitats throughout the state, with shortgrass prairie depicted in tan and occurring predominantly in the eastern portion of the state.

Colorado's 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan

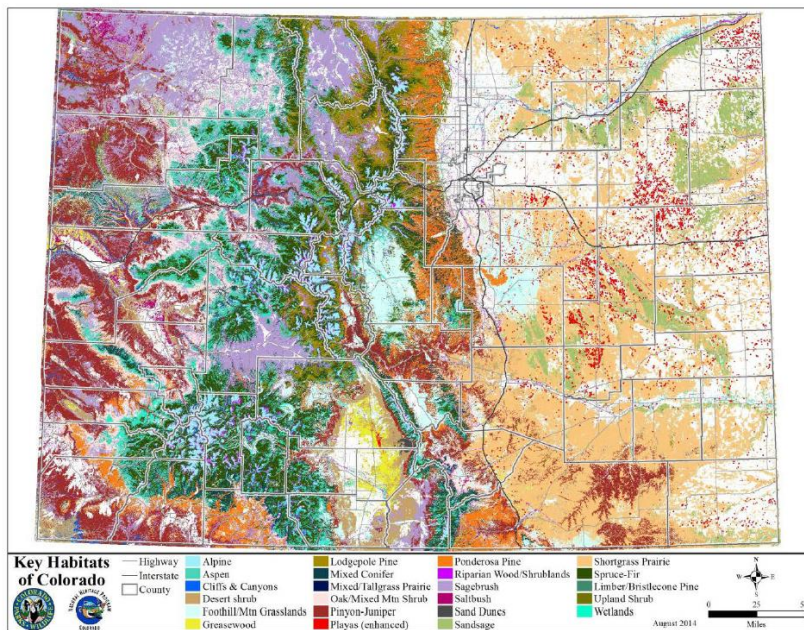


Figure 1. Distribution of key terrestrial habitats in Colorado.

Chapter 6 of the SWAP<sup>xlii</sup> describes conservation actions pertinent to the shortgrass prairie: “This grassland habitat type is the most abundant in Colorado and, while degraded, is generally in better functioning ecological condition than the other grassland habitat types in eastern Colorado. The use of conservation easements is the most effective tool to address development and conversion pressures in this habitat type. Effective outreach to improve grazing management that restores vegetation condition, function, and structure will address other threats in this habitat type. Several important forbs, shrubs, and half shrubs (i.e., winterfat, native prairie clovers, leadplant) associated with this habitat type are absent or heavily reduced, negatively impacting wildlife habitat potential; this can be addressed by effectively implementing improved grazing management on public and private shortgrass prairies.”

Table 14 in the SWAP<sup>xlii</sup> shows that there are 11,855,161 acres of shortgrass prairie in Colorado. **The minimum size of a patch of shortgrass prairie to be considered viable as an ecological system at the landscape scale is 50,000 acres.** There are 1,827 patches of shortgrass prairie in the state, with the largest patch consisting of 1,072,828 acres. [Emphasis added]

In comparison, the WHOS property consists of 1,027 acres and is partially fragmented by residential and commercial development. The Conservation Plan for Grassland Species in Colorado,<sup>xliii</sup> issued by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (now CPW) in 2003, largely focuses on conservation efforts in the millions of acres of shortgrass prairie present in eastern Colorado, particularly the USDA National Grasslands and privately-owned grasslands. The 2003 plan does include a section addressing habitat management along the Front Range and states: **“the fragmentation of the remaining shortgrass prairie habitat in areas of increasing urban growth along the front range do not support an intact shortgrass prairie ecosystem.** For example, Jones and Bock (2002) note that in Boulder County, which manages one of the most extensive grassland open space systems in North America, shortgrass associated bird species declined significantly between the 1980’s and 1990’s amid rapid urban growth in the area. They conclude that grassland open space areas may support populations of mixed grassland birds, but sustaining species associated with the shortgrass prairie would be difficult. Many of the conservation objectives and actions outlined in this Plan are focused on management of eastern plains colonies and complexes where biologically it makes the most sense to focus efforts.”

However, the shortgrass prairie at WHOS still provides a refuge for wildlife in the urban environment as well as provides educational and wildlife viewing opportunities for the community.

The map below shows grassland habitat conditions throughout the state, with minimal significant grassland existing in the western metro Denver area.

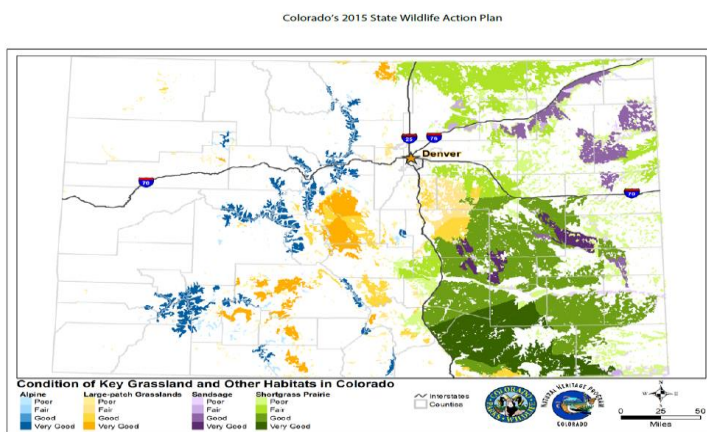


Figure 19. Terrestrial upland habitat condition – Grasslands and Other Habitats

## Wildlife

The ERO Conditions Report<sup>xlvii</sup> stated that no federally threatened, endangered, or candidate wildlife species were observed during the 2023 site visit, and ERO further determined that WHOS does not contain suitable habitat for most of these species.<sup>xlviii</sup>

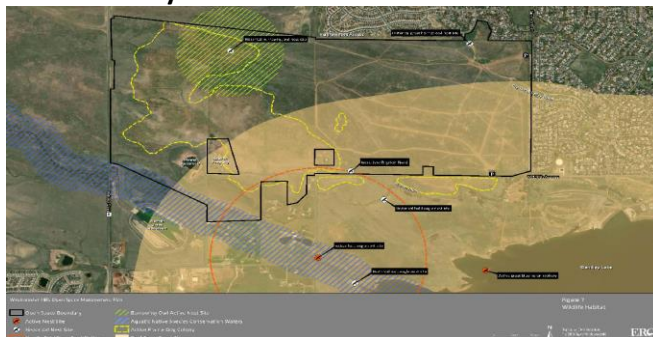
CPW identifies state-specific species of concern<sup>xlix</sup> in addition to species protected under federal regulations. Species on this state-specific list identified on the WHOS property by ERO include the burrowing owl and the black-tailed prairie dog.

### Burrowing Owl

The burrowing owl is considered "state-threatened" and one of Colorado's Species of Greatest Conservation Need. CPW's species profile<sup>i</sup> for the burrowing owl describes "the burrowing owl usually lives in dry, open areas with short grasses and no trees. They nest and live in underground burrows created by prairie dogs, ground squirrels and badgers." The 2003 Conservation Plan for Grassland Species in Colorado<sup>ii</sup> states that the average territory size for a burrowing owl nesting site has been estimated at 1.98 acres, within a range of 0.1 acres to 4.0 acres; and further that defense of territories is largely limited to the immediate area around the nest burrow, with 95% of all movements occurring within 600 m of the nest burrow." The 2003 plan identifies primary causes of death in burrowing owl breeding areas as predation, vehicle collisions, human disturbance (especially from agricultural activities, construction and shooting), toxic chemicals (either direct mortality or loss of prey) and weather (severe hail).

Although the burrowing owl is capable of excavating its own burrows in certain types of soil, they most often use holes excavated by other animals, particularly by prairie dog colonies. Destruction of prairie dog colonies has the largest impact on burrowing owl populations in the state of Colorado. The greatest threats to the burrowing owl are loss of habitat due to residential and commercial development as well as dramatic reductions in prairie dog populations from targeted eradication efforts, poisoning, recreational shooting, and sylvatic plague. The SWAP<sup>iii</sup> states that the conservation of the burrowing owl hinges on the protection of healthy prairie dog colonies and identifies several resources for conservation actions and plans. One of these plans is the 2003 Conservation Plan for Grassland Species in Colorado,<sup>iiii</sup> which focuses primarily on working with private land owners and the federal grasslands which contain the vast majority of suitable habitat for the burrowing owl.

As noted in the ERO report,<sup>liv</sup> provided by the PRL, the burrowing owl habitat on WHOS is directly next to the Greenway Trail. Due to Broomfield withdrawing from the Greenway trail, the western section will need to be rerouted to complete the trail to the Indiana bridge project. **Failing to change the course of the Greenway Trail will be in direct conflict with the burrowing owl habitat.**



## Black-Tailed Prairie Dog

The black-tailed prairie dog is considered a "state special concern" species. CPW's species profile for the black-tailed prairie dog describes the black-tailed prairie dog as the most common type of prairie dog.<sup>iv</sup> The black-tailed prairie dog is widely considered a "keystone species" to indicate the health of a prairie ecosystem. At the time of publication of the 2003 Conservation Plan for Grassland Species,<sup>vi</sup> Colorado had already exceeded all acreage and distribution targets defined in the Multi-state Conservation Plan for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog in the United States (Luce 2003). This species is not currently threatened or included in the 2015 CPW SWAP.<sup>vii</sup>

The 2010 Westminster Wildlife and Natural Resource Management Plan for Open Space Properties<sup>lviii</sup> identifies the black-tailed prairie dog as a potential conflict species and notes that "feeding and burrowing cause devegetation, resulting in loss of topsoil and beneficial flora, and drainage issues." This creates a conservation approach where the population of prairie dogs must be managed in order to prevent decimation of the natural shortgrass prairie vegetation which in turn causes an increase in noxious weeds. The presence of human and domestic dog activity in the eastern portion of the WHOS has limited the spread of prairie dog colonies and associated impacts, which can be seen from the ERO report<sup>lix</sup> which shows noxious weeds more heavily concentrated on the western side of the WHOS.

The City of Westminster Open Space Plan F - Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem<sup>lx</sup> describes the devastating impact that unchecked populations of prairie dogs had on the WHOS. "Soon after acquisition of the property, this site was designated as a prairie dog habitat in an effort to save and relocate prairie dogs from other developments within the City. Over the years, the prairie dog population on this site steadily increased and eventually exceeded the carrying capacity of the site. Soil erosion and noxious weed infestations soon became serious issues on this site. After an outbreak of bubonic plague and a major reduction in the prairie dog population in 2009, this site is targeted for native grass revegetation and a return to a balanced ecosystem."



Westminster Hills Open Space circa 1998



Westminster Hills Open Space 2009

*City of Westminster Open Space Plan F - Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem<sup>lxi</sup>*



The City of Westminster Open Space Plan D - Prairie Dog Management<sup>lxii</sup> classifies the WHOS as a "Prairie Dog Conservation Area (PDCA)". The classification specifies that, "the population of prairie dogs on this parcel will be frequently monitored and adaptively managed (control needs will be defined by prescribed acreage, population, vegetation, and/or soil parameters) to ensure that noxious weeds, soil erosion, and impacts to adjacent landowners/land uses are maintained at an absolute minimum."

## **Noxious Weeds**

The Colorado Department of Agriculture identifies and categorizes noxious weeds into three categories, List A, B, and C. List A Species are designated for eradication. List B Species require that a noxious weed management plan be implemented to stop the continued spread of the species. List C Species are to be controlled as necessary while evaluated and studied through a management plan, without the goal of stopping the continued spread of the species.

ERO surveyed the WHOS in 2023 and identified eleven List B species and seven List C species present on the property.<sup>lxiii</sup> The most prevalent noxious weed at WHOS is the Dalmatian toadflax which was present on nearly 500 acres of the property.

The City of Westminster Open Space Plan I – Integrated Pest Management Plan<sup>lxiv</sup> states that "Noxious weed infestations have contributed to the loss of agricultural productivity and ecological functions on both public and private lands, including some of Westminster's most valuable and productive wildlife habitat. Noxious weeds pose a serious threat to the integrity of our natural resources. These non-native plants compete aggressively against native species for nutrients, water, and space. If left unchecked, these noxious weeds have a tremendous capacity to invade native plant communities and suppress or eliminate their ability to survive."

The Colorado Noxious Weed Act (§§ 35-5.5-101–119, C.R.S.) requires all public and private landowners in the State of Colorado to control noxious weeds and makes it unlawful to intentionally allow any noxious weed to grow without management. The Colorado Department of Agriculture provides a variety of resources to assist in the control of noxious weeds throughout the state.

## **E. coli Contamination in Ditch Water**

*Escherichia coli* (abbreviated as *E. coli*) is a type of bacteria which can cause illness when ingested. There are hundreds of different strains of *E. coli*, the majority of which do not cause human illness. *E. coli* is transmitted by ingesting food or water that is contaminated with the bacteria.

ERO conducted sampling of water in the ditch and found *E. coli* levels that gradually increased over the summer and eventually exceeded the EPA's threshold value<sup>1</sup>. Samples were collected in two locations, as the water enters the park and as it exits the park. *E. coli* levels were not significantly different between the two sampling points, indicating the contamination likely occurs prior to the water entering the WHOS. Further investigation determined that the water passes through several grazing pastures and leach fields upstream of the WHOS. The sampling data indicates that dog waste is unlikely to be a significant contributing factor in contamination.

The Church Ditch Authority owns the water prior to the Church Ditch termination near the intersection of 100th Avenue and Simms Street, where it becomes the Dry Creek Valley Ditch and enters the WHOS. The ditch is an irrigation canal and is not a state water. It is not included in federal or state regulations for which water quality standards apply.

EPA's 2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria (RWQC) recommends actions to take for the detection of E. coli in recreational waters. However, this document applies to primary contact recreation, which is defined as "activities where immersion and ingestion are likely and there is a high degree of bodily contact with the water, such as swimming, bathing, surfing, water skiing, tubing, skin diving, water play by children, or similar water-contact activities."

The Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) requires natural swimming areas to be closed if a laboratory result shows an E. coli concentration above 235 organisms per 100 milliliters (Regulation 5 CCR 1003-5). CDPHE regulations at 5 CCR 1003-5 defines a natural swimming area as "a designated portion of a natural or impounded body of water in which the designated portion is devoted to swimming, recreative bathing, or wading and for which an individual is charged a fee for the use of such area for such purposes."

Current use of the ditch water in the WHOS is limited to dog contact. It does not meet the EPA definition of primary contact recreation, nor does it meet the CDPHE definition of a natural swimming area. There are no regulatory requirements necessitating a response to prevent access to the water. Of interest, CDPHE has registered more than 2,300 miles of waterbody segments on its impaired waters list due to E. coli levels, including segments of Boulder Creek which are heavily used by the public for tubing and wading in summer months. Unlike the Church Ditch and Dry Creek Valley Ditch, these waterbodies are state waters and regulated under the Clean Water Act, but serve as examples of E. coli impacted water bodies that remain unrestricted from public access.

The route of exposure for human ingestion of E. coli from the ditch water at WHOS is extremely low and can be further mitigated with public awareness.

## Environmental Considerations

The WHOS consists of shortgrass prairie and wildlife species of concern, in addition to providing an invaluable outdoor recreational resource to the community. The 2015 SWAP<sup>kv</sup> elaborates on this duality: "This threat assessment was undertaken strictly from the perspective of wildlife conservation. Some of the identified practices are also necessary and highly valued public services and land uses – for instance, water development, residential development, recreation, mining, and agriculture. These activities provide important values and are legitimate, often vital public pursuits, from which all of society benefits. Nonetheless, aspects of some of these activities are sometimes harmful to wildlife and their habitats, which are also legitimate public values and resources; therefore, these actions pose challenges from the viewpoint of wildlife conservation. These challenges need to be identified in order to determine which are most harmful, and importantly, where opportunities for investments in remedial or preventive actions would be most effective and efficient."

The shortgrass prairie habitat does not exist at a significant scale in the metro-Denver area. The suitability of the WHOS for a thriving shortgrass prairie ecosystem is limited by its size, the fragmented nature of the land, and the competing value of the land for community outdoor recreation. The Westy Dog Park Guardians understand the need to balance the two critical objectives of conserving the shortgrass prairie while preserving public access to a treasured recreational resource. The Problems and Solution section was developed to address this balance.

## Environmental Problems and Solutions

1. **Reroute the Greenway Trail:** as currently constructed, the Greenway Trail routes cyclists through the middle of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. As posted, and reinforced through City management comments at the public meeting held April 2016, cyclists should yield to pedestrians through the dog park. However, to route cyclists through an active dog park encourages negative encounters. What's more, the Greenway Trail already must be rerouted due to its termination in Broomfield, as Broomfield withdrew from the Greenway Trail project on October 27, 2020. As previously noted, the western section of the Greenway Trail on Westminster property is in direct conflict with the burrowing owl habitat as identified in the ERO report.

The Guardians believe this is an opportunity to create a win-win scenario for multiple park user groups. By rerouting the Greenway Trail farther south and following the existing concrete bike path west, then linking to the existing Mower Loop, Indiana Connector, and Prickly Pear Trails, the PRL will accomplish the following goals:

- a. Cyclist enjoyment: Not only does this take cyclists out of an active dog park, they will gain a partial loop around the Open Space Mower Reservoir water feature.
  - b. Dog walkers and families: Limit negative interactions with cyclists who do not comply with posted right-of-way.
  - c. Burrowing owls: Greatly reducing the bike traffic will decrease disturbance of their habitat and greatly reduce future traffic, giving them space to prosper. Vehicle collisions are a known cause of mortality for the burrowing owl.
  - d. Eagles: as noted in City presentations, the protected eagle habitat now extends across Alkire St. This protected location is where there are future plans to expand the concrete path. By taking the Greenway Trail directly west, the eagle protection zone is undisturbed.
  - e. Alkire St. neighbors: By routing the path directly west, the City will increase the distance between bike traffic and residential property.
  - f. City of Westminster: Not only will the City save the expense of additional enforcement of bicyclists through the dog park, the City will also save on major potential eminent domain and related legal expenses. This will also allow a more direct trail to Indiana St. that is less costly and safer for bicyclists than the 96<sup>th</sup> Street proposal.
2. **Use Cherry Creek as a Model:** recommend a management plan similar to that done by the Colorado State Parks for the Cherry Creek State Park Dog Off-Leash Area in 2010 which would provide a specific management direction.

3. **Drought:** recognize that WHOS is impacted by fifteen years of ongoing drought conditions which have weakened existing natural resources within the Open Space system, making restoration of native plants more difficult. No efforts at targeted replanting have been observed within WHOS, other than after the 2023 cement trail construction and near the Simms St. parking area.
4. **Non-Native Trees:** recommend to be removed and replaced with native species; however, no planting has been observed in WHOS since prior to 2012 near the Simms parking area.
5. **Urban Development:** recognize the effect to regional and local hydrology, disrupting the underlying seasonal patterns critical to reestablishing and maintaining natural/native landscapes. Despite recent surrounding urban growth including both Skyestone to the north property line of WHOS, and Candelas located west of Indiana, no specific measures have been implemented to address the impacts of the increasing urban encroachment.
6. **Education:** importance of educating the public with information to increase awareness of Open Space, promote understanding of natural systems, and to instill a sense of stewardship have not been implemented at WHOS. No public education for weed management has been implemented within WHOS, or via posting of informational signage. No training or volunteer opportunities for weed removal have been offered.
7. **Fencing:** despite directives that buck and rail fence shall be used along open space perimeters and at areas to direct access to trails, wire strand fencing has been placed in areas which create hazards to WHOS visitors and wildlife. Visible damage to existing buck and rail fencing can be seen at the 100<sup>th</sup> lot as it is not protected by proper placement of cement parking bumpers. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has published a "Fencing with Wildlife in Mind" guide which could help to determine the most appropriate fencing options that are considerate of the specific wildlife present at WHOS as well as suitability for dogs.
8. **Trash receptacles:** place and maintain trash receptacles at both parking lots/site entrances which are to be emptied at least once a week. Contrary to the recommendations, trash receptacles were removed from site entrances at both WHOS parking areas.
  - a. Install additional trash cans throughout the park.
  - b. Adjust collection schedules to ensure proper maintenance.
9. **Dog Feces:** bag dispensers are to be located at all Open Space parking lots and/or site entrances, access trails and dog parks. Despite this recommendation, and documented increase in visitors, in 2022 several bag dispensers were removed from each WHOS parking entrance areas.
  - a. Ensure poop bag dispensers are stocked.
  - b. Post signage indicating fines for failure to pick up dog waste.
  - c. Enforce fines for visitors who do not pick up waste.
10. **Litter Clean Up:** regularly scheduled volunteer clean-up efforts are needed throughout the City's Open Space system. The last WHOS volunteer clean-up was in January 2017.
  - a. Partner with the Westy Dog Guardians to host regularly scheduled Community Clean Up Days.
  - b. Post signage recommending ways to help keep the dog park clean.

11. **Educational Signage:** recognize the importance of educating the public with information to increase awareness of Open Space, promote understanding of natural systems, and to instill a sense of stewardship should be implemented at WHOS. Increase the sense of community by improving educational signs at the WHOS kiosks at both entrances to the park. Signs should include a trail map, information about sharing the trails, courtesy expected for different users, as well as education about native plants and wildlife present in the WHOS. Consider allowing the public to post signs, such as information for community clean up days or communication of current management consideration to eliminate the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.
12. **Social trails and impact to wildlife:** Some of the trails at WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park have been in existence since before the City acquired the land as Open Space. These trails existed as roads used to support cattle that were grazing on the land. Many of these roads continue to be used today by Park Rangers and serve an important management function allowing ease of access for park staff to navigate the WHOS. These roads also allow for easier emptying of trash cans. However, unofficial trails have increased with the density of human and domestic dog activity throughout the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. Of particular concern is the impact of increased disturbances to the burrowing owl, a Colorado Species of Concern. The following solutions are proposed to mitigate impacts to wildlife, while preserving community off-leash dog use at the park.
  - a. Establish a new official trail map.
    - i. Determine appropriate trails to close while maintaining functionality of the WHOS trail system, taking into account the ability to provide varying lengths of loops that diverse visitors can choose to walk.
    - ii. Maintain road access enabling strategically-placed trash cans to be serviced.
    - iii. Ensure appropriate buffers are maintained between trails to create larger uninterrupted spaces for wildlife. The ERO Report<sup>lxvi</sup> recommends a 75-meter buffer zone (or 246 feet) from trails based on the zone of influence for most grassland bird species in Colorado.
    - iv. A physical map showing the official trails should be posted in key locations throughout the park, and the maps should also include locations of trash cans.
  - b. Protect the western 600 acres as an ecological sanctuary.
    - i. Limit trails to provide greater areas of undisturbed land.
    - ii. Close this portion of the WHOS to dogs entirely.
    - iii. Install fences as necessary and post signs clearly dividing the east and west sides of the WHOS.
  - c. Protect burrowing owl habitat. The Greenway Trail currently runs directly through the historical burrowing owl nesting grounds. Reroute the Greenway Trail by using the existing southern concrete path in the eastern portion of the WHOS, and continue the route through the southern section, and then the western edge, of the western portion of WHOS. This will avoid the burrowing owl nesting ground and avoid the need to implement seasonal closures of the bike trail during nesting season (March 15 – October 31), as specified by the CPW Recommended Survey Protocol and Actions to Protect Nesting Burrowing Owls.<sup>lxvii</sup> This will also serve to keep bikes and dogs separated while diminishing the potential for negative interactions.
  - d. Implement prairie dog management guidelines established in the City of Westminster Open Space Plan D - Prairie Dog Management<sup>lxviii</sup> (and update plan as needed) to control excessive devegetation and the spread of noxious weeds.

13. **Trail widening and vegetation trampling:** Significant widening of trails has occurred throughout the years and trampling of plants alongside trails has created conditions where noxious weeds can outcompete native plants. Strategies to repair the land along trails include the following.
- a. Implement mud day closures.
    - i. Utilizing typically used procedures such as cones, signs, gates, etc. , and with closure parameters agreed upon with the proposed WHOS Advisory Board, close the area during excessive mud days.
    - ii. Communicate closures to the public by posting updates on the WHOS Open Space Dog Park website.
    - iii. Manage access at the north and east neighborhood entrances by posting signs.
  - b. Use control measures to funnel foot traffic.
    - i. Install trail guards to designate width of official trails.
    - ii. Place straw or grass mats to further delineate reclamation areas alongside trails.
    - iii. Temporarily close targeted areas for revegetation as needed.
  - c. Revegetate and reclaim barren corridors alongside official trails.
    - i. Create a long-term revegetation plan. Identify sections of the park requiring regrowth. Develop a schedule for when specific sections will be targeted, likely a multi-year timeline.
    - ii. Plant native plants to clearly define the edges of trails.
    - iii. Plant native grasses following guidelines outlined in the City of Westminster Open Space Plan F - Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem.<sup>lxix</sup> plant during the optimal window between October 1 and April 30. Drill seeds into the soil at specified depths to allow existing native vegetation to continue growing along with newly planted seeds. Native grasses to be planted include the following: blue grama, buffalograss, western wheatgrass, Canby bluegrass, Arizona fescue, sandberg bluegrass, slender wheatgrass, and little bluestem.
    - iv. Plant species that are missing from a shortgrass prairie, such as important forbs, shrubs, and half shrubs identified in the CPW SWAP<sup>lxx</sup> (i.e., winterfat, native prairie clovers, leadplant).
  - d. Simms entrance: The Simms Street entrance to the park is the site of the heaviest degradation at WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park and requires special attention to repair.
    - i. Repurpose log barriers previously used to close trails to funnel foot traffic and clearly establish trails.
    - ii. Add additional entrances into the park from the parking lot instead of the current single entrance. This will help disperse foot traffic and reduce the bottleneck effect.
    - iii. Target revegetation efforts to reduce barren areas and areas with dense bindweed growth.
  - e. 100th Ave. entrance: The 100th Avenue entrance currently funnels Greenway Trail and off-leash dog users into a bottleneck. Re-establish additional entrances off of parking lot for off-leash dog users to mitigate potential negative interactions between user groups.

14. **Noxious weeds:** Noxious weeds are present throughout the WHOS and compete with native plants. Eleven List B species and seven List C species are currently growing in the WHOS.
- Follow weed management recommendations published by the Colorado Department of Agriculture<sup>lxxi</sup> for each species found at WHOS. Management strategies include seeding areas with competitive grasses, applying herbicides, manually pulling out rooted plants, and utilizing animals and insects to feed on targeted plant species.
  - Follow guidelines in the City of Westminster Open Space Plan I - Integrated Pest Management.<sup>lxxii</sup> Establish a priority list and inventory of weeds. Select control methods. Develop preventative measures. Increase involvement of volunteer program. Educate community about types of noxious weeds.
  - Inform the public whenever herbicides are applied to the land. Post clear signs in areas where herbicides have been sprayed, including the date of application, to communicate potential hazards.
  - Implement a standardized mowing schedule to target weeds before seeds can be spread.
  - Plant native grasses that can compete with weeds.
  - Institute volunteer dig-up days. Target high density noxious weed areas or high-use areas such as the Simms St entrance.
15. **Ditch and E. coli contamination in water:** ERO conducted sampling of water in the ditch and found E. coli levels that gradually increased over the summer and eventually exceeded the EPA's threshold value.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Management methods of this situation should focus on public awareness and limiting human exposure, as the sampling data indicates that dog waste is unlikely to be a significant contributing factor in contamination.
- Post signs for awareness, discouraging human contact with water. The Dry Creek Valley Ditch Authority owns the water (along with a 25' easement on either side of the ditch) and has indicated they will post these signs at no cost to the City. Signs should communicate the presence of E. coli and discourage human contact with the water.
  - Work with Ditch authorities. The Church Ditch Authority owns the water prior to the Church Ditch termination near the intersection of 100th Avenue and Simms Street, where it becomes the Dry Creek Valley Ditch. Coordination with the Dry Creek Valley Ditch is required regarding activities within the 50' easement inside the WHOS.
  - Install additional bridge(s) across the ditch. The ERO report included a recommendation to install additional bridges across the ditch. Although costly and requiring coordination with the Dry Creek Valley Ditch Authority, additional bridges would reduce the bottleneck and degradation at the current sole existing bridge and help to spread out traffic across the park.



# Parking

Due to the popularity of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, weekend usage has exceeded the available parking spaces in the two lots serving the Dog Park. For years, neighbors have complained to the City regarding neighborhood parking. Below are solutions to consider with the goals of alleviating stress on the Park's neighbors and ensuring a vibrant usage of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park.

1. Neighborhood
  - a. Residential parking permits should be issued as in use in the neighborhood surrounding Standley Lake High School. The framework is already in place with City staff and Law Enforcement.
2. To control costs for the City, parking lots and surrounding neighborhoods should only be -monitored on weekends to begin with a reevaluation after two years.

## Solutions for Overcrowded Weekends

- a. Strictly enforce parking laws throughout the summer/fall to establish a pattern of enforcement.
- b. Use City media representative to get the message out to the general public.
- c. Use City media representative to publish information regarding busy days and times, encourage alternatives such as Cherry Creek, Chatfield, etc.
- d. Use City media representative to leverage multiple social media channels repeatedly throughout the summer and fall to encourage alternatives.
- e. Sponsors for parking sign – Guardians will work to find sponsors for a “Lot Full?” sign i.e.: “Get 10% off at XYZ Restaurant while you wait for lots to clear”
- f. Explore parking alternatives such as the former boat storage lot at Standley Lake
- g. Start on weekends, if it drives traffic to weekdays, reevaluate.
- h. Community feedback needed for the following, more restrictive options and greater burden to City:
  1. Paid parking, max 2 hour sessions
  2. Weekend Pass/Pricing System
    - a) Tiered pricing for Westminster residents, Jefferson county residents, etc.
    - b) Low income options
    - c) Donation option at purchase
    - d) Annual passes: possibly available only for Westy residents and/or Regional residents of Broomfield/Arvada
    - e) Timed entry reservation system



# Signage

The November 2014 Open Space Stewardship Plan included the topic of signage. Kiosks at trailheads showing designated trails, trail maps, including QR codes and trail ID signs at the different trail merge points will result in well-marked trails helping people newer to the park know what to expect on their walk. Signs with distance markers may also be educational for people who are interested in knowing the distances of each trail so they can adjust their walk/run/bike based on their condition, the condition of their dog, and the temperature.

In addition to these signs, it would be valuable and beneficial to utilize kiosks at the trailheads/parking lot entrances to post signs with the park rules and associated fines, as well as community messaging such as press releases from the city and notifications that changes are coming. Additionally, the kiosks can be used to post signs to educate the public about children in off-leash dog areas and about different types of dog behavior you may see in the park. There are already signs educating about the rattlesnakes, which offer the opportunity to include more information around tips such as rattlesnake avoidance training, snake identification chart, what to do if you encounter a snake, and local emergency vets who keep antivenom in stock. The community can also use signs to designate a small lost and found area, designated at each kiosk, where people can place items they find along the trail or where they can post a message about a lost or found item.

Creative and fun signs, including drawings from local kids, can be posted around the park in various locations to educate patrons about the Open Space, such as the short grass prairie, native plants, grasses, and area wildlife. Signs and ropes can be used around revegetation areas discussing the purpose and benefits of the restoration efforts. Small signs throughout the park, and on trash cans, can encourage and educate people about the benefits of Park stewardship, such as staying on the trail and picking up an extra pile of poop.

Signage can be posted on the north and west sides of the park about closures due to nesting owls, why these closures are necessary, and the dates of the closures. These signs can be similar to the signs that Boulder County uses for raptor closures in some of the popular climbing areas. The City can connect with the Ditch Authority, which has stated it will post signs, at no charge to the City, letting people know to stay out of the ditch water. The Ditch Authority has provided these signs in other areas to educate people and advise them against contact with the water.

It would also be valuable to place a sign on the Greenway Trail, where it enters the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, alerting bikers that for a small section, they will be riding through an Off-Leash Dog Area.

These educational signs will help people feel more engaged and educated about the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park and the environment around them. When people are educated, they are more invested while taking pride in being a part of its success. To continue this education and engagement around the park there can be a QR code posted on the kiosk linking to the City of Westminster's website or social media page, or even a newsletter where the City can post safety tips, mud closure days, updates on how the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is improving based on the efforts of the City and the patrons, and small educational pieces about things pertaining to the Open Space or seasonal changes in the Park. Finally, for community pride, consider a sign to place at our entrances stating we are one of the Top Dog Parks, and possibly even the largest Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park, in the US.

# Zoning Issues

The Westy Dog Park Guardians have received numerous inquiries about zoning at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. The Zoning District and the PRL Classification of the Dog Park are currently in conflict.

The Guardians recommend that the WHOS Dog Park be:

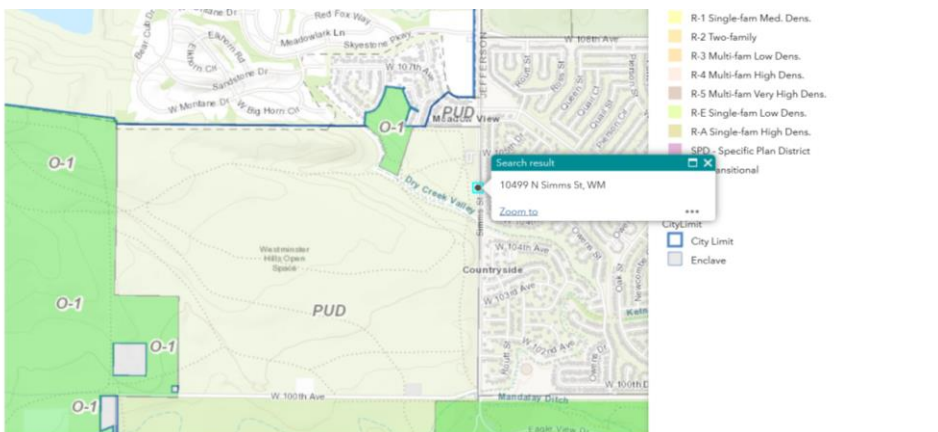
1. Rezoned to O-1 Open Space;
2. Reclassified as a Regional Park, which would conform to the classification of Westminster's two other regional recreational destinations, City Park and Standley Lake Regional Park; and
3. Renamed the Westminster Hills Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park, which officially affirms off-leash dog use.

Below please see information on Zoning District and PRL Classifications, along with screenshots, for the WHOS Dog Park, City Park, and Standley Lake Park.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

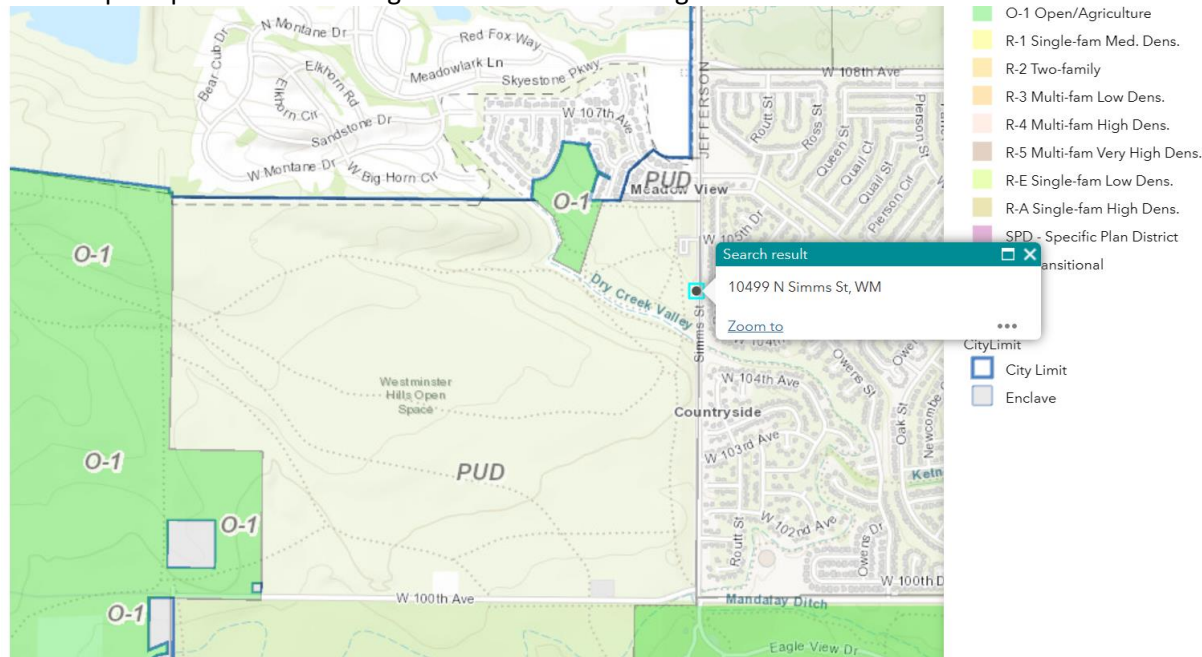
## WHOS Dog Park Zoning Designation

On April 22, 2024, members of the Westy Dog Park Guardians contacted Jefferson County to inquire about potential zoning issues at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. Becky Daleske, Survey and Research Analyst, confirmed via email that Jefferson County has no jurisdiction over any zoning in the City of Westminster, including the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. She provided the following street address for the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park: 10499 Simms Street.

The Westminster Planning Department website provides a page devoted to Zoning in the City of Westminster.<sup>lxxv</sup> The interactive map indicates that nearly the entire 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, located at 10499 Simms Street, is largely currently zoned as Planned Unit Development (PUD), as depicted in the following screenshots from April 22, 2024, and enlarged below. There are 2 carve-outs in the NE and SW corners of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park that are currently zoned O-1 Open Space/Agricultural.



## WHOS Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park: Screenshot Enlarged



## WHOS Dog Park PRL Classification

The PRL Classification is described in the lower right corner of each Park, on its individual website. The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is classified as Open Space.<sup>lxvii</sup>

Westminster Hills Open Space Off-Leash Area

Open Space Amenities

- Dog drinking fountain
- Partially fenced
- Restroom facility (portable)
- See off-leash rules below
- Shade shelters
- Two parking lots: located at 10499 Simms St. and 11610 W. 100th Ave.

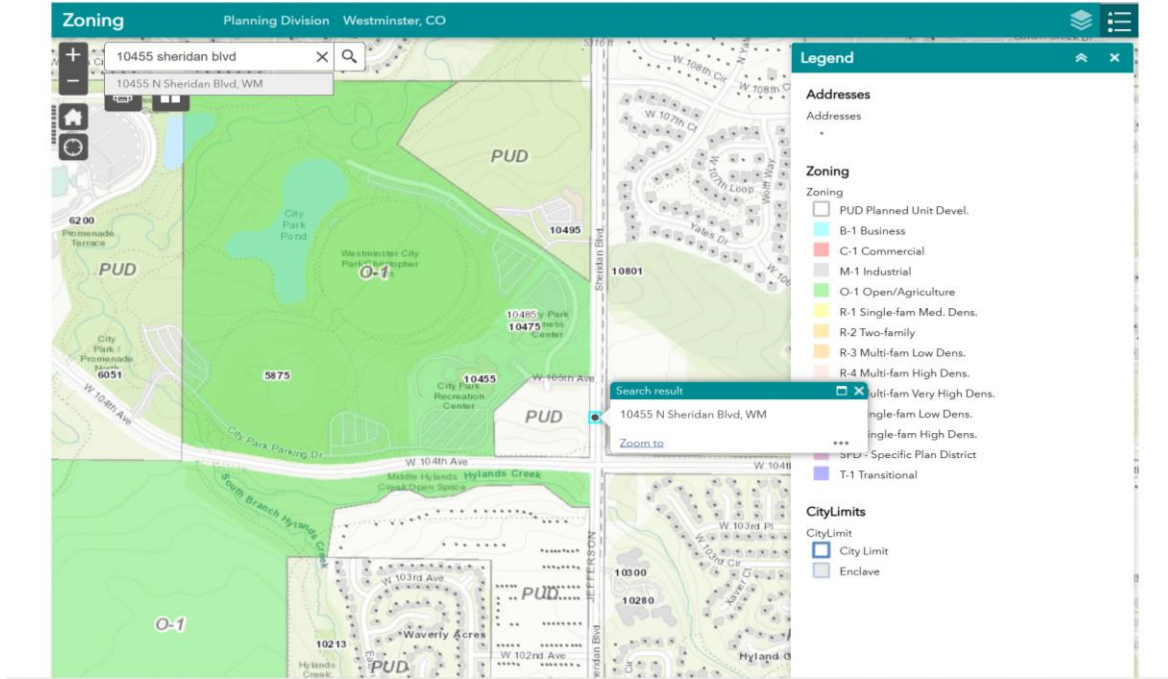
CLASSIFICATION: Open Space

# City Park Zoning Designation

City Park is zoned O-1 Open Space.

Welcome To The Interactive Zoning Map

Enter Your Address, zoom to your property, and click on it to find the zoning information you are looking for!



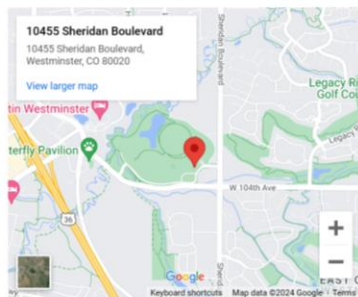
# City Park PRL Classification

City Park is classified as a Regional/Citywide Park. <sup>lxxvii</sup>

Homepage > Parks & Recreation > Parks, Trails & Open Space > City Park

## City Park

**Disc Golf Course Closure:** The City Park disc golf course is closed due to three ongoing improvement projects in the area which will extend through 2025. At this point it is unclear whether the disc course can be safely reinstated following the completion of this improvement work. During the closure, staff are actively exploring alternative disc golf sites. Stay tuned for more information!

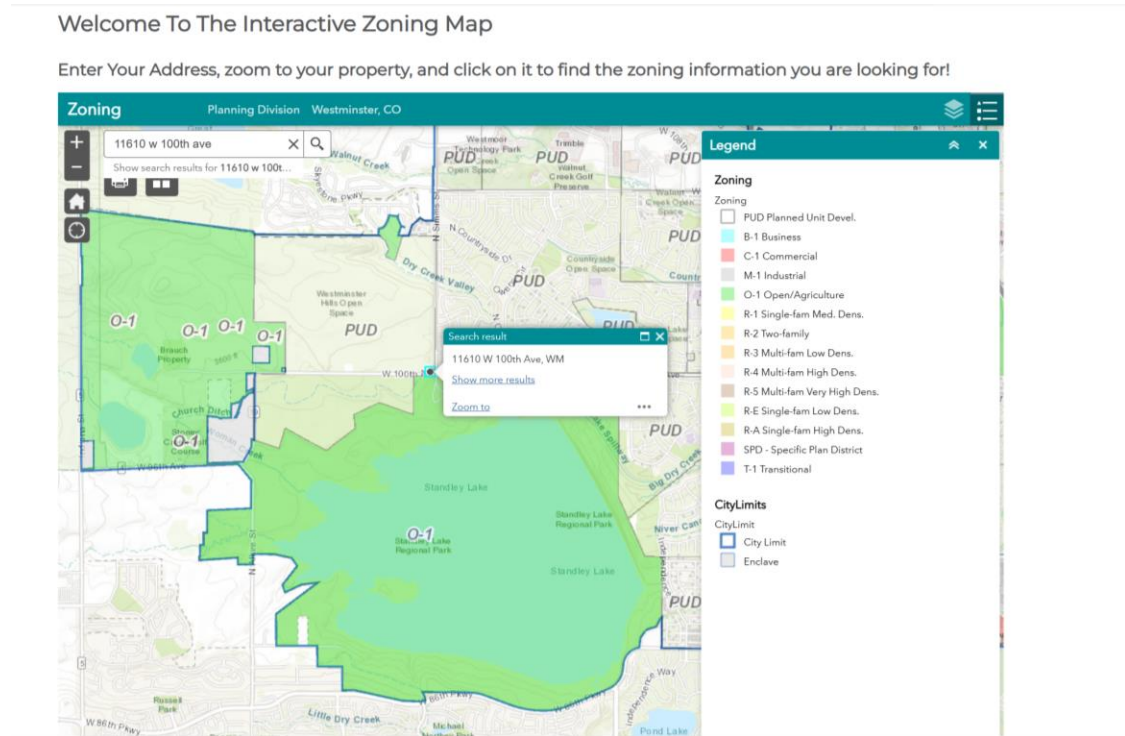


### Park Amenities

- Access to Open Space (Big Dry Creek, North Hylands Creek)
- Access to regional trail (Big Dry Creek)
- Armed Forces tribute garden
- Christopher Fields - Softball fields (4)
- Drinking fountain
- Fitness center
- Parking
- Paved loop walking path with climbing stairs
- Pavilions (3 - 1 is reservable: [Reservation Information](#))
- Picnic tables (19)
- Playground equipment
- Pond (**NO FISHING ALLOWED**)
- Recreation center
- Restroom facility (portable)
- Restroom facility at Christopher Fields
- Skateboard park
- Soccer fields (4)

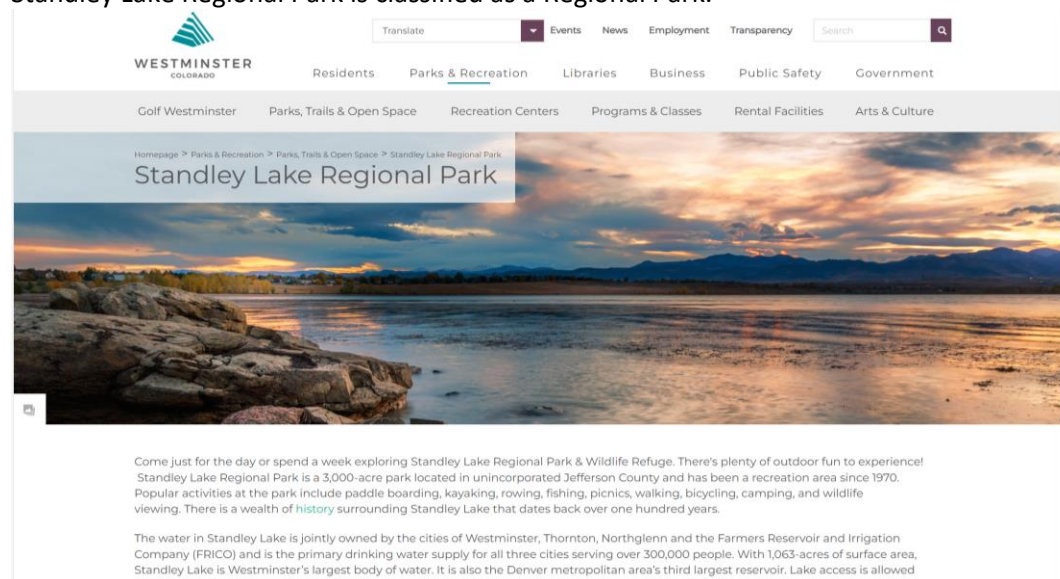
# Standley Lake Regional Park Zoning Designation

Standley Lake Regional Park is zoned O-1 Open Space.



# Standley Lake Regional Park PRL Classification

Standley Lake Regional Park is classified as a Regional Park.<sup>lxviii</sup>



## Municipal Code Sections Defining PUD & O-1 Open Space

Multiple sections of the Westminster Municipal Code are relevant to the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, as it is currently zoned as PUD:

Section 11-4-1 of the Westminster Municipal Code defines PUD as “A district where a maximum amount of flexibility is allowed in order to create a unified, innovative approach to mixed use design.” It also defines an O-1 OPEN DISTRICT as “An agricultural and open district for providing an area of the City devoted to the production of agricultural crops and livestock, as well as preserving and protecting agricultural and non-urbanized areas until urbanization is warranted and the appropriate change in district classification is made.”

Section 11-4-7 states “The PUD District is intended to provide the means and the guidelines through which tracts of land are developed through an overall development plan that integrates the land uses and site considerations for the land as a unit, rather than the traditional standard treatment of land uses in other so-called Euclidian districts in this Code. It is intended to reflect maximum design freedom to make the best use of topography and land features and to permit the developer an opportunity to more fully utilize the physical characteristics of the site through the reduction of lot sizes and the absence of setback and bulk restrictions; to provide for diversification and flexibility in housing types, housing prices, and overall design; to encourage innovative development of smaller parcels of land that have been passed over; to encourage mixed-use developments, including uses such as residential, office, and commercial; and to encourage higher quality development than possible under traditional standard zoning regulations.”

## WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park Use

Section 11-4-7(C)(1)(a) also states that all uses that are permitted in an O-1 District are allowed in a PUD District.<sup>lxxix</sup>

The PRL currently allows off-leash dogs and cycling use at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. Off-leash dog use has been allowed for 24 years. Cycling use has been marketed since the PRL bisected the Off-Leash Dog Park with the Rocky Mountain Greenway Bike Trail in 2016, which is 8 years. Both of these active uses are allowed in a PUD District.

The Dog Park is a destination, and the Greenway Trail is a throughway. People spend money at destinations. They use throughways to get to destinations. The Greenway Trail is like Highway 36. Drivers use 36 to travel through Westminster to get to Denver and Boulder. The Dog Park is like Casa Bonita. Dog owners make a special effort to drive to this regional treasure to exercise with their dogs, then they buy groceries or have a meal.

## Park and Open Space Typologies (Classifications)

Below are the five PRL Park and Open Space Classifications.

1. **Neighborhood Parks** provide a focal point and identity for neighborhoods while offering a mix of active and passive recreation space: between 0.5-15 acres in size;
2. **Community Parks** provide opportunities for active recreation for the greater community: typically between 15 and 50 acres in size;
3. **Citywide Parks** serve the entire city population and function as a civic center for the community with a range of active and passive uses, events and activities: range from 51 to 250 acres;
4. **Regional Parks** are citywide and regional destinations that provide regional recreational activities with a diverse landscape and range of active and passive uses, including wildlife preservation: over 50 acres; and
5. **Conservation and Open Space** conserves natural amenities, views and habitats, providing opportunities for recreation and passive use, which could include hiking, biking, horseback riding and nature study: range in character, function, and size.<sup>lxxx</sup>

## List of Westminster Parks by PRL Classification and Zoning Designation

Below are the parks currently listed on the City of Westminster PRL website.<sup>lxxxi</sup> The acreage and current Park and Open Space Typologies (Classifications) are derived from each individual park website, and the Zoning Designations are derived from a search of each park address on the City of Westminster Interactive Zoning Map. Park and Open Space Typologies (Classifications) are further described in Chapter 7 of the 2013 Westminster Comprehensive Plan.

There are 44 parks currently zoned PUD, including the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park. There are 17 parks currently zoned R-1, R-A, R-3, SPD, B-1, C-1, or M-1. There is 1 Neighborhood Park that is zoned both PUD and O-1 Open Space. There is 1 Community Park, 1 Regional/Citywide Park, and 1 Regional Park that are currently zoned O-1 Open Space (bolded below).

- Amherst Park, 6.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>lxxxii</sup>
- Big Dry Creek Park, 18-acre Community Park, R-3 Multi-Family Low Density<sup>lxxxiii</sup>
  - Big Dry Creek Dog Park, within the 18-acre Community Park, R-3 Multi-Family Low Density<sup>lxxxiv</sup>
- Bishop Park, 6.4-acre Neighborhood Park, R-A Single Family High Density<sup>lxxxv</sup>
- Carol Butts Park, 32-acre Community Park, R-1 Single Family Medium Density<sup>lxxxvi</sup>
- Central Plaza Park, 1.32-acre Urban Plaza, SPD Specific Plan District<sup>lxxxvii</sup>
- Cheyenne Ridge Park, 5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>lxxxviii</sup>
- **City Park, 205-acre Regional/Citywide, O-1 Open/Agriculture**<sup>lxxxix</sup>
- Cobblestone Park, 8.11-acre Neighborhood Park, O-1 Open/Agriculture and PUD<sup>xc</sup>
- Cotton Creek Park, 7.5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>xc</sup>
- Dover Square Park, 5.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>xcii</sup>
- Downtown Westminster Center Park, 3-acre Community Park, SPD Specific Plan District<sup>xciii</sup>
- England Park Ball Field, 9.3-acre Neighborhood Park, M-1 Industrial<sup>xciv</sup>
- Faversham Park, 18-acre Community Park, PUD<sup>xcv</sup>
- Fireman's Park, C-1 Commercial<sup>xcvi</sup>
- Foxshire Park, 6.42-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>xcvii</sup>
- Fred Valente Humanitarian Park, 1.4-acre Neighborhood Park, R-A Single Family High Density<sup>xcviii</sup>

- Green Knolls Park, 4.8-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>xcix</sup>
- Hampshire Park, 5.5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>c</sup>
- Irving St Park, 5.9-acre Neighborhood Park, B-1 Business<sup>ci</sup>
- Jessica Ridgeway Memorial Park, 3.2-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cii</sup>
- Kennedy Park, 2.4-acre Neighborhood Park, R-A Single Family High Density<sup>ciii</sup>
- Kensington Park, 2.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>civ</sup>
- Kings Mill Park, 3.7-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cv</sup>
- **Little Dry Creek Dog Park, Community Dog Park, O-1 Open/Agriculture** <sup>cvi</sup>
- Mayfair Park, 10.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cvi</sup>
- McFall Park (formerly known as Westminster Center Park), 10-acre Special Use, PUD<sup>cvi</sup>
- Meadowlark Park, 10.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cix</sup>
- Mike Lansing T-Ball Fields, 6.3-acre Neighborhood Park/Special Use, PUD<sup>cx</sup>
- Municipal Park, 6.2-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cx</sup>
- Nottingham Park, 6.8-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxii</sup>
- Oakhurst Park East, 2.7-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxiii</sup>
- Oakhurst Park West, 5.86 Community Park, PUD<sup>cxiv</sup>
- Oakwood Park, 2.7-acre Neighborhood Park, R-A Single Family High Density<sup>cxv</sup>
- Orchard Park, 11-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvi</sup>
- Park 1200, 3.5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- Promenade Terrace, 1.7-acre Special Use, PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Quails Crossing Park, 3.1-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxix</sup>
- Ranch Park, 5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxx</sup>
- Roemersberger Fields, 7.5-acre Special Use, PUD<sup>cxxi</sup>
- Ryan Park, 13-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- Sensory Park, 1-acre Special Use (Sensory Park is the city's first completely accessible play area, built in cooperation with Children's Hospital.), PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Sherwood Park, 15-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Somerset Park, 1.7-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxv</sup>
- Squires Park, 16.6-acre Community Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- **Standley Lake Regional Park, 3000-acre Park located in unincorporated Jefferson County, O-1 Open/Agriculture** <sup>cxvii</sup>
- Stratford Lakes Park, 5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Stratford Park, 6.4-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxix</sup>
- Sunset Park, 7.4-acre Neighborhood Park, R-1 Single Family Medium Density<sup>cxix</sup>
- TeBockhorst Park, 4.7-acre Neighborhood Park (formerly known as Trendwood), PUD<sup>cxix</sup>
- Tepper Fields, 10-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- Terrace Park, 1.2-acre Neighborhood Park, R-1 Single Family Medium Density<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Torii Square Park, 1.7-acre Neighborhood Park, R-1 Single Family Medium Density<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Trailside Park, 10-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxv</sup>
- Waverly Acres Park, 11.3 acres public land dedication, 1 acre developed Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- Westbrook Park, 3.2-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxvii</sup>
- Westcliff Park, PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Westfield Village Park, 25-acre Community Park, PUD<sup>cxviii</sup>
- Westminster Hills Open Space Off Leash Area, no acreage listed, PRL Website Classification is listed as Open Space, Zoning Map PUD, with the exception of 2 carve-outs in the NE and SW corners<sup>cx</sup>
- Westminster Hills Park, 2.4-acre Neighborhood Park, R-1 Single Family Medium Density<sup>cx</sup>



- Westminster Station Park Nature Playground, 37.5-acre Community Park, SPD Specific Plan District<sup>cxlii</sup>
- Willowbrook Park, 10.6-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxliii</sup>
- Windsor Park, 13-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxliv</sup>
- Wolff Run Park, 15.5-acre Neighborhood Park, PUD<sup>cxlv</sup>

## WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is a Regional Asset

The PRL has acknowledged the value to the City of Westminster as a regional recreational and economic asset since at least 2014: “The dog off-leash area is very popular and is considered a regional or ‘destination’ facility that attracts users living outside Westminster.”<sup>cxlvi</sup> In fact, the PRL General Management Guidelines Map indicated the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park as an Urban Natural/Transitional area, not Urban Natural, which is the designation for the remainder of the 607 acre Westminster Hills Open Space, or Sensitive/Urban Natural.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park is necessarily regional because it is bordered on the north by the Skyestone neighborhood of Broomfield.<sup>cxlviii</sup> It is also very close to the Candelas neighborhood in Arvada that is located to the southwest of the Park.<sup>cxlix</sup>

Although it is hard to imagine that the City of Westminster would build on any of the 44 parks that are currently zoned PUD, the 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park, as currently zoned PUD with the exception of 2 carve-outs in the NE and SW corners, is not necessarily zoned against future development, including housing. However, the Westminster city attorney has stated that since Jeffco Open Space funds were used, in part, to purchase the land, the property cannot contain future housing.

## Recommendations for Zoning and PRL Classification

In order to protect the 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park against future development, satisfy the will of the people, and safeguard this regional economic asset, the Guardians urge the City Council to:

1. **Rezone it** to O-1 Open Space;
2. **Reclassify it** as a Regional Park, which would conform to the classification of Westminster’s two other regional recreational destinations, City Park and Standley Lake Regional Park; and
3. **Rename it** the Westminster Hills Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park, and officially affirm off-leash dog use.

# Consolidated Recommendations and Budgeting for WHOS Dog Park Advisory Board Consideration

Because we acknowledge that there are some issues at the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park and because there is no money allocated to the Dog Park in the PRL budget,<sup>cl</sup> the Guardians propose the following 2024 cost-effective plan that can be implemented very quickly. We call our recommendations the Dogs On Ground Strategic (DOGS) Plan.

2024

- Minimal budget impact
  - Establish a WHOS Dog Park Advisory Board charged with strategic plan development
  - Collaborate with the Guardians to enhance community involvement and stewardship
    - Park volunteering
    - Fundraising strategies for reroute of Greenway Trail
  - To fix the Zoning and Classifications Issues
    - Rezone the Dog Park to O-1 Open Space;
    - Reclassify the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park as a Regional Park, which would conform to the classification of Westminster's two other regional recreational destinations, City Park and Standley Lake Regional Park; and
    - Rename the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park the Westminster Hills Open Space Off-Leash Dog Park, which officially affirms off-leash dog use.
  - Establish a well-developed Trail Map (see recommended map below)
  - Develop and implement communication strategies updating park users of changes
    - City website/social media
    - Signage at park
    - Trail ambassadors
  - To improve the Weekend Parking Problems
    - Implement Residential Parking Permits in the Countryside neighborhood, where illegal parking is an issue. This framework is already established in the neighborhood surrounding Standley Lake High School, and it is familiar to City staff and Law Enforcement.
    - Monitor parking by Law Enforcement only on the weekends, when it is an issue, to control costs for the City.
    - On the weekends, Park Rangers place a large orange traffic barrel, with a sign indicating that parking is limited to Countryside residents, at the intersection of Simms and 105<sup>th</sup> Drive, to discourage illegal parking.
  - To address the Environmental Concerns
    - Reinstate Dog Park Clean-Up Days
    - Reinstall Poop Bag Dispensers and Trash Cans
    - On Mud Days, Park Rangers place large orange traffic barrels, with Park Closed Today signs, at each Parking Lot entrance, to control costs for the City.
    - Enhance fines for failure to clean up dog waste

- Target areas for revegetation, use simple barriers or temporary closures to protect revegetation projects.
    - Use barriers to funnel foot traffic and reduce the width of trails.
    - Use the Dry Creek Valley Ditch Authority’s signage for E. Coli at ditch which is free to the City
    - Remove signs enforcing COVID-19 social distancing
    - Close western 600 acres to dogs with clear signage
    - Follow weed management recommendations published by Colorado Department of Agriculture
    - Plant native grasses that can compete with the weeds
    - Implement volunteer dig-up days
  - To reduce interactions between Dogs and Bikes
    - Within the Trail Map encourage and funnel dog owners to trails other than the Greenway Trail
    - Post trail map at multiple locations through dog park using Boulder’s 6”x6” as a model
- Moderate budget impact
  - Install trail guards to designate width of official trails
  - Place straw, grass mats, to further delineate reclamation areas
  - Advisory Board identify temporary closure of targeted areas for revegetation

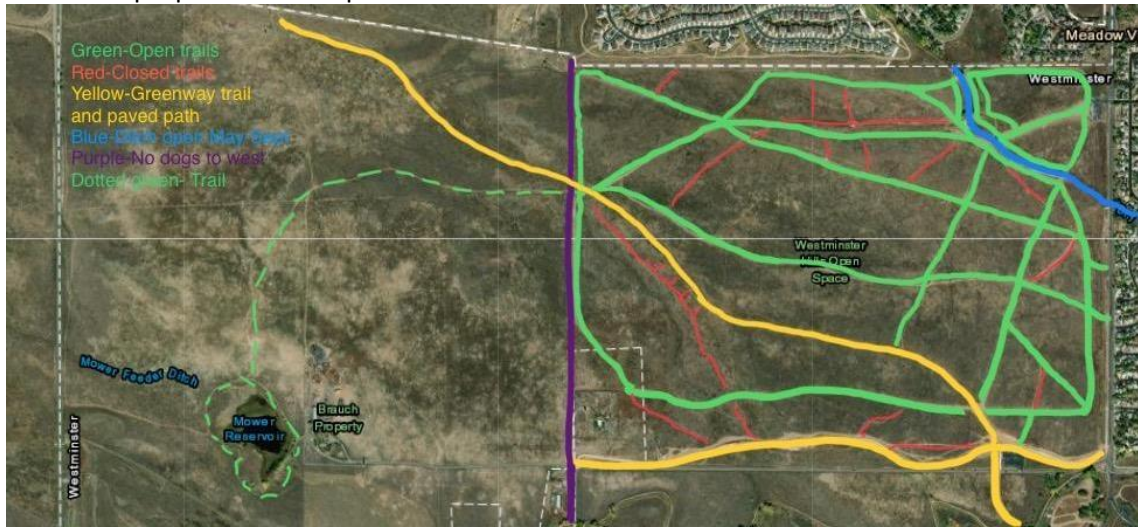
## 2025

- Minimal budget impact
  - Create a contest for signage designed by local children
    - Revegetation
    - Trail closure
    - Share the road/be kind to bikes (parking lot exit)
    - Educational (birds, land history, etc.)
  - Create memorial opportunities to raise funds for the park
    - Kickoff with Ryan Powell memorial bench
- Moderate budget impact
  - Implement mud day closures.
    - Utilizing typically used procedures such as cones, signs, gates, etc. , and with closure parameters agreed upon with the proposed WHOS Advisory Board, close the area during excessive mud days
    - Develop communication strategy similar to Boulder—website, text messages, social media
    - Post signage with violation fines at north and east neighborhood entrances

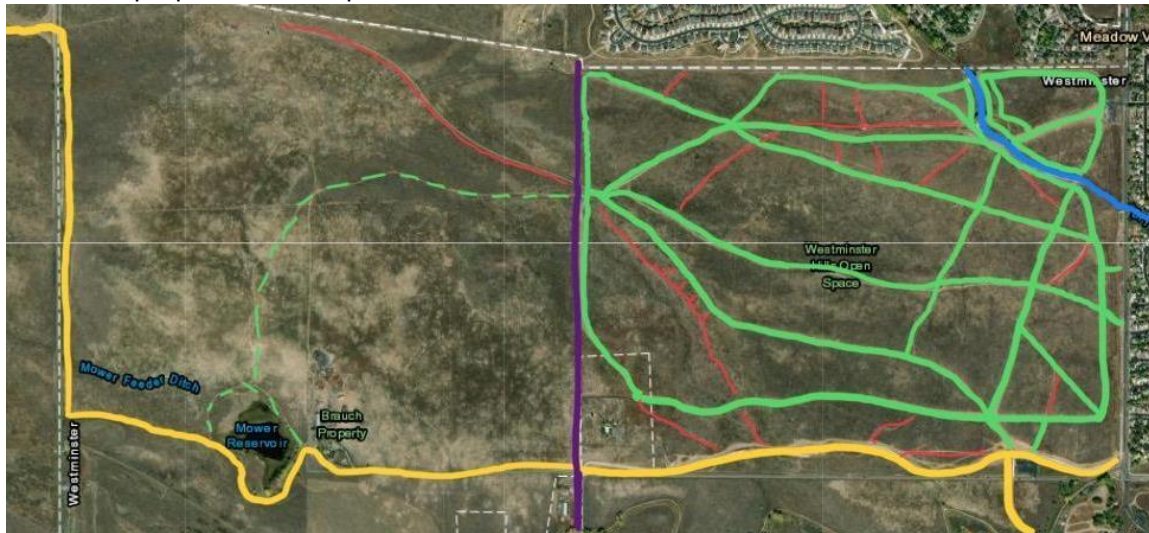
## 2026

- Large budget impact
  - Reroute Greenway Trail
    - Approximately 5572 feet to Indiana, much of which is already paved
    - Approximately 3679 feet to Indiana bridge
  - Consider installing additional bridges over the ditch

Guardians proposed trail map 2024-25



Guardians proposed trail map 2026



Distances in feet between trails



Distances between trails

# Conclusion

Local dog owners are a diverse population of residents and neighbors that deserve an exercise and recreation space where we can safely exercise with our dogs. The vast majority of us are responsible dog owners and good citizens. As with any of the parks and recreation spaces, there are some responsible citizens who take care of the resources, and there are some less responsible citizens who fail to manage their impact.

There is strong public support, demonstrated in three PRL surveys in the last year, indicating nearly 80% of survey respondents want the 420-acre WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park retained as an Off-Leash Dog Park. The WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park amounts to approximately 6.4% of the 6,600 acres of parks and open space managed by PRL. This regional asset is a unique spot for diverse dog owners to establish a sense of community belonging and to exercise safely with their dogs. Data suggests this population may be underserved.

The dog owners that love the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park are an impassioned group of people who support developing solutions to the issues and who seek to become better stewards of this 420-acre regional recreational and economic treasure.

This is the opportunity for the City of Westminster to:

- Acknowledge, affirm, retain, and protect the 420-acre the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park;
- Collaborate with the Westy Dog Park Guardians to promote and model dog-park citizenship, stewardship, and leadership; and
- Consider a plan to develop a second large off-leash dog park to capitalize on this Colorado-style recreation activity and economic resource.

The Westy Dog Park Guardians are seeking to increase our stewardship of the WHOS Off-Leash Dog Park through a collaboration with the City of Westminster that includes education, clean-up, and connection, and that makes a positive impact on our community, **together**.



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- <sup>i</sup> Westminster Hills Open Space Area Management Plan Current Conditions Report, PowerPoint Slide 37, November 2023, [PowerPoint Presentation \(westminsterco.gov\)](#); Westminster Hills Off-Leash Dog Park, [Westminster Hills Off-Leash Dog Park \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>ii</sup> Westminster Hills Open Space Area Management Plan, [Westminster Hills Open Space \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>iii</sup> ERO Resources Corporation, Westminster Hills Open Space Conditions Report, Jan. 10, 2024, [DRAFT \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>iv</sup> Visitor Survey Results, conducted summer 2023, Slide 34, [Visitor Survey Results.pdf \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>v</sup> Westminster Hills Open Space (WHOS) Area Management Plan – Community Feedback, [WHOSCommunityFeedbackALL2-15-2025WEB-FINAL.pdf \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>vi</sup> [WHOSManagementOptionsSurveyResults.pdf \(westminsterco.gov\)](#)
- <sup>vii</sup> [Petition · KEEP WESTMINSTER HILLS DOG PARK COMPLETELY OFF-LEASH! - United States · Change.org](#)
- <sup>viii</sup> David Sachs, *Denver has more Dogs than Children, and Everything Else we Learned about Denver’s Dog Parks*, Denverite, Dec. 16, 2019, [Denver has more dogs than children, and everything else we learned about Denver's dog parks - Denverite, the Denver site!](#).
- <sup>ix</sup> Edwin Plotts, *Pet Ownership Statistics by State, and So Much More (Updated 2020)*, Pawlicy Advisor, [Pet Ownership Statistics by State, And So Much More \(Updated 2020\) | Pawlicy Advisor](#).
- <sup>x</sup> Brooke Williams, *Dogs in Colorado are Some of the Most Spoiled in the US*, *Forbes Advisor Says*, Fox31 KDVR, Dec. 17, 2023, [Dogs in Colorado are some of the most spoiled in the US | FOX31 Denver \(kdvr.com\)](#).
- <sup>xi</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xii</sup> The Know, *Is Denver the Most Dog-Friendly City in the Country? This New Study Says Yes*, The Denver Post, Nov. 17, 2021, [Is Denver the most dog-friendly city in the country? This new study says yes. – The Denver Post](#).
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>xiv</sup> Big Dry Creek Dog Park, [Big Dry Creek Dog Park \(westminsterco.gov\)](#); and Little Dry Creek Dog Park, [Little Dry Creek Dog Park \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>xv</sup> Westminster Hills Open Space Area Management Plan Current Conditions Report, PowerPoint Slide 37, November 2023, [PowerPoint Presentation \(westminsterco.gov\)](#); Westminster Hills Off-Leash Dog Park, [Westminster Hills Off-Leash Dog Park \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Westminster, Colorado, Parks, Trails, and Open Space, [Trails \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
- <sup>xvii</sup> [CFL - FLAP Colorado 2016 \(jeffco.us\)](#)
- <sup>xviii</sup> Westminster Hills Open Space, Background Information, [Westminster Hills Open Space \(westminsterco.gov\)](#).
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