

# ***Dalla Mountain Park Management Plan***



Adopted by Durango City Council  
February 7, 2006

Updated Management Plan Adopted by  
Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board  
March 11, 2019



This updated 2019 Dalla Mountain Park Management Plan replaces the 2006 Dalla Mountain Park Management Plan in full.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Dalla Mountain Park is 177.8 acres in size, located at the north western end of Durango City limits. The Park is rich in natural and biological diversity and encompasses resources that are unique to the Four-Corners Region. Dalla Mountain Park is immediately adjacent to Animas City Mountain and contributes to the scenic viewshed which is highly visible from many parts of the community. The Open Space Park serves as a transition area between the structured, formalized city and the natural landscape of the San Juan National Forest. Its proximity to downtown Durango and surrounding public lands, as well as its significant natural, wildlife, and passive recreational values, makes the property a valuable open space for the community.

The creation of Dalla Mountain Park was made possible with financial support from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and the corresponding conservation easement held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy. With the City's purchase completed in 2005, preservation of Dalla Mountain Park has been ensured for the betterment of the environment as well as future generations of the community.

Working in coordination with the City's Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board, this plan has been prepared to provide a framework for the sound stewardship of the property, a plan that recognizes the importance of Dalla Mountain Park to both man and environment.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA**

Dalla Mountain Park is located on the southwestern slope of Animas City Mountain, a 1,200-acre property owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Together with this BLM property, and adjoining City of Durango and La Plata County properties, this block of contiguous, public open space totals over 1,500 acres. On the northwestern boundary of this block of public land are a number of privately-owned conservation easement properties. The San Juan National Forest boundary lies less than 0.4 miles north of this Open Space Park. To the west of Dalla

Mountain Park are several private holdings on the valley floor of the Junction Creek drainage and adjoining these holdings to the west is the State of Colorado Perins Peak State Wildlife Area managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Although the Dalla property had always been in private ownership, it has historically been used for passive recreational activities such as hiking, rock climbing and wildlife watching. The property is laced with an assortment of trails. Many of the trails serve as viable routes to recreational and viewshed destinations.

An ecological assessment of the property was conducted by the Fort Lewis College Biology Department in 2001. The study found the area to be rich in ecological value, with hundreds of species of plants and animals documented. Some even considered very unique and rare. Among those noted in the report were the hybrid "Live Oak"; the "Claret Cup Cactus"; the "Plateau Striped Whiptail Lizard"; and the "Tassel-Eared Squirrel". The report is available for review at the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department.

Dalla Mountain Park hosts a mix of steep terrain and relatively flat benches; large rock outcrops and cliffs; massive standing boulders; and extensive scenic vistas. Most of the property is heavily wooded in the ponderosa/mountain shrub forest common in this region. Dominant tree and shrub species include ponderosa pine, gambel oak, mountain mahogany, chokecherry, and serviceberry. Small open meadows located on the flatter benches are vegetated with native grasses and wildflowers. The Park is important wildlife habitat serving as a bridge between the Perins Peak State Wildlife Area and Animas City Mountain. This corridor provides critical forage and cover for an assortment of wildlife including black bear; mountain lion; grey fox; bobcat; a variety of birds including band-tailed pigeons, jays, woodpeckers, Merriam's turkeys, black-capped chickadees, and rufous-sided towhees; squirrels; porcupines; deer mice; chipmunks; hares; rabbits; shrews; and voles. The area is recognized by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) as a critical winter range for mule deer and elk.

The bands of cliffs that rise above the property and serve as a backdrop to it meander over property lines with the adjacent BLM land. On those cliffs are a number of historic Indian petroglyphs.

Logging occurred in the area in the early 1900s, resulting in stands of younger ponderosa pine. However, there are some ponderosa on the property that are well over 200 years old. In the mid 1970s a residential development plan was approved. While no lots were ever sold, a gravel access road was built. This road provides access into the upper reaches of the property.

A baseline assessment of the property has been prepared and is available for review at the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department.

### **III. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

It is the intent of the City of Durango to manage the Dalla Mountain Park in order to:

- Maintain the site in a largely undeveloped and natural state as wildlife habitat and as a passive recreational open space area;
- Identify and protect unique natural and archeological features of the site;
- Uphold the requirements of the conservation easement held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy;
- Restore the site to a condition more representative of its natural historic condition by eliminating non-native plant species and invasive weeds; thinning of the Gambel Oak under-story; and correcting erosion and drainage problems;
- Establish a formalized trailhead at the property's access road intersection with Junction Creek Road;
- Provide a trail system, with signage, that allows for functional, appropriate, and sustainable access to destinations within the site and to adjoining public lands;
- Minimize impacts to or conflicts with the adjacent public and private lands;
- Provide opportunities for local outdoor education;
- Provide permitted access into the property using the existing access road for physically challenged and handicapped individuals.

### **IV. SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

1. Management authority for the Dalla Mountain Park shall be the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department. Specific management activities shall be consistent with this Management Plan and the conservation easement held by La Plata Open Space Conservancy. Proposed activities deemed inconsistent with the management plan or easement shall be reviewed and considered by the City of Durango's Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board; and the La Plata Open Space Conservancy. Proposed improvements which prove controversial shall be referred to City Council for a final decision with a recommendation from the Board.
2. Proposed changes to the Management Plan shall be circulated to the appropriate City Departments, Advisory Board, outside agencies, and La Plata Open Space Conservancy for review and comment prior to formal action by the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board.

3. The site shall be maintained in its natural state with public recreational use limited to non-motorized trail-oriented activities consistent with the requirements of the conservation easement (walking, hiking, jogging, rock climbing, mountain biking, environmental education, winter recreation provided there is no seasonal closure, etc.).
4. All uses/activities within Dalla Mountain Park shall be subject to City Park and Open Space rules and regulations. The City shall be responsible for enforcement of all regulations. The following uses/activities shall be specifically prohibited within the Dalla Mountain Park:
  - overnight camping
  - fires of any kind
  - no smoking
  - hunting or discharge of firearms/weapons
  - dogs not on a leash
  - injury to or molestation of birds, game or wildlife
  - unauthorized motorized vehicles
  - destruction of natural vegetation (except for purposes of property maintenance consistent with the management plan and conservation easement)
5. Substantial development of facilities within the Park is not anticipated. Improvements on the property are envisioned to be limited to:
  - A. **Trails:** The existing trail system shall be evaluated on a routine basis to determine functionality, appropriateness and sustainability. The maintenance, closing and/or rerouting of existing trails, and the development of new trails, shall be based upon this evaluation and the participation and input of the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board.
  - B. **Signage** on the property may include:
    - Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) recognition
    - Rules/regulations
    - Dalla family recognition placard placed on large boulder
    - Recognition of La Plata Open Space Conservancy (LPOSC), Trails 2000, or other partnering entities
    - Trail routing signage
    - Interpretive/educational signage
    - Identification of perimeter boundaries
    - Seasonal closures, if appropriate
    - Other temporary or seasonal signage as deemed appropriate
  - C. **Trailhead improvements:** The trailhead located at the property's access drive intersection shall be improved and formalized. This may include paving of the parking area, trailhead signage, restroom; picnic tables, and

other amenities and/or improvements consistent with standards for such facilities, and intent of the management plan.

6. The general public shall have non-motorized access to the property in accordance with this Management Plan. The trail system and access drive, as maintained or improved, shall be available for non-motorized recreational activity. The access road shall also be available to motorized emergency vehicles and motorized City maintenance vehicles in accordance with this Management Plan.
7. The City, at its discretion, may elect from time to time to temporarily close the property, or selected areas of the property, when it is deemed necessary for the protection and/or rejuvenation of specific resources, including wildlife and vegetation. This may include seasonal closures for habitat protection based on a coordinated management policy for the larger Animas City Mountain as determined through consultation with Bureau of Land Management and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.
8. A detailed property assessment shall be undertaken to determine the specific location, type, and quantities of unique plant and animal habitat/species, and unique natural or archeological features in advance of any fire mitigation, trail system modification, or other stewardship activities consistent with this Management Plan.

## **V. AMENDMENT/UPDATE**

This Management Plan shall be amended from time to time as necessary, due to significant changes in use patterns and/or changes in land use policies on adjacent public lands, provided the Management Plan continues to protect the intent of the original acquisition and the conservation easement. Parks and Recreation Department staff will review the Management Plan annually in conjunction with the La Plata Open Space Conservancy monitoring requirements for the Conservation Easement. The City will consult with the Natural Lands Preservation Advisory Board in the amendment and/or update process.

If additional adjacent lands are acquired, these lands will be added to the Dalla Mountain Park. As these properties are acquired and formally designated, they shall be automatically subject to this Management Plan.

## **VI. NEAR-TERM STEWARDSHIP GOALS**

**Trailhead Improvements:** The trailhead at Junction Creek Road was formalized in 2006, which included grading, drainage and road access modifications. A memorial plaque recognizing the Dalla family was installed in 2018. Additional trailhead signage considered for 2019 includes trail system map, rules/regulations, partnering agency recognition. Future items that may be considered include an

improved parking area, a restroom; picnic tables; and other amenities and/or improvements consistent with the management plan.

**Trails:** The existing trail system will continue to be evaluated for its functionality, appropriateness and sustainability. Wayfinding signage at trail intersections will be updated, replaced or added. Socially created trails will be closed. Cooperation and consultation with adjacent land management agencies as well as recreational user groups will occur in order to manage an approved trail system that is consistent with the terms of the conservation easement and the management plan, as well as seasonal closures or cultural resource protection regulations.

**Management Cooperation:** The City will continue cooperative management discussions with the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and La Plata County relative to the potential integration of the management and closure policies for Dalla Mountain Park with the existing Animas City Mountain Management Policies.

## **VII. ONGOING STEWARDSHIP GOALS**

**Annual Maintenance:** Annual and ongoing maintenance will be based on routine inspection and need. Typical ongoing maintenance shall include weed mitigation, fire mitigation, trash removal, erosion control, vandalism repair, trail system repair and improvements, and routine maintenance and improvements required to address normal wear and tear of amenities.

**Habitat Protection and Enhancements:** Based on the findings of the baseline assessment and other research efforts undertaken from time to time, habitat protection and enhancement efforts consistent with this Management Plan may be undertaken to improve the ecological and biological diversity and health of the property.

**Law Enforcement:** The City of Durango Police Department serves as the entity responsible for providing law enforcement on the property as of the annexation of the property into the City limits of Durango in 2014. Additionally, the existing subdivision plat for Jacob's Cliffs was vacated prior to annexation per the stewardship goals of the 2006 Management Plan.

**Camping Mitigation:** City staff will continue to monitor the property for illegal camping activities, and when necessary mitigate camping, trash, and camping-related impacts.

**Biological or Cultural Resources Site Assessment:** If necessary, a biological or cultural site assessment shall be undertaken to determine the specific location, type, and quantities of unique plant and animal habitat/species, and unique natural or cultural resources to be preserved, in advance of fire mitigation, trail system modification, or other stewardship activities consistent with this Management Plan.

**Wildfire Fuels Reduction:** The property will be evaluated by City staff and when necessary, appropriate fire authorities, and a wildfire fuels reduction plan will be implemented to reduce hazardous fuels.

**Noxious Weed Abatement:** The property has been added to the existing weed mitigation program currently administered by the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department. Weed abatement efforts will occur annually, as needed.

**Erosion Control:** The property will be evaluated by City staff as needed, and an erosion control plan will be implemented to reduce runoff when and where necessary.

**Volunteer Engagement:** City staff will continue to engage community volunteers and partner with volunteer-focused organizations in the ongoing stewardship of the property.

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# Dalla Mountain Park Map

