

## Lake County Open Space Initiative

The Lake County Open Space Initiative (LCOSI) was formed in the winter of 1997, in response to simultaneous real estate offerings of over 7000 acres of historic ranchlands along the Arkansas River corridor in Lake County, Colorado. The subject lands represented: important foreground and middle ground view sheds framing Colorado's highest peaks, as viewed from the Top of the Rockies National Scenic and Historic Byway; critical wetland, riverine, and low-land riparian ecosystems; prime big game winter, calving, and transitional habitats; crucial landscape linkages between the Sawatch and Mosquito Mountain Range's; traditional wildlife migration routes, spawning grounds and waterfowl flyways; unique recreational opportunities along the headwaters of one of the Nation's most significant waterways; and tangible links to the rich mining and ranching heritage of the State and Region.

The Open Space Initiative was formed at the invitation of the Lake County Board of County Commissioners, and represents a diverse and varied stakeholders group with a common interest in preserving the intrinsic, natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the Upper Arkansas River Basin. The partnership has evolved over the intervening years in response to dynamic change, and represents a broad cross section of public interests, including; local, state, and federal agencies; private entities and individuals; and governmental and quasi-governmental bodies, bound by a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to the common vision of the partners.

The actions and decisions of the LCOSI Partnership are consensus based, and non-binding on the partners. LCOSI decisions are not intended to supersede the mandates and implementing legislation of the individual jurisdictions, but rather, to provide collaboratively generated, ecosystem based management direction for integration into the planning processes of the individual entities that control the lands within the Open Space. LCOSI itself does not own or control any real property.

The Vision of the LCOSI Partnership is:

*The acquisition and stewardship of land and water resources in Lake County by a partnership of federal, state and local agencies and organizations for the purpose of: protecting and enhancing critical wildlife habitat; conserving open space; restoring impacted habitats; securing public access; increasing recreational opportunities; preserving cultural, agricultural, scenic and historic resources; increasing public awareness and education; and enhancing sustainable growth and development opportunities in Lake County.*

Using a combination of fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements, stewardship trust programs, and land tenure adjustments, the Lake County Open Space Initiative has been successful in placing over 8000 acres of land under a single Ecosystem Management Plan for conservation management.

An Ecosystem Management Plan views the land in much the same way as wildlife does, as an interwoven matrix of forage, water, travel routes and cover, rather than as a series of political or jurisdictional property lines, and seeks to manage the land and its resources to their highest and best use, regardless of man imposed boundaries. The plan recognizes man as an integral part of the ecosystem, and acknowledges the need to seek balance between human and wildlife resource needs.

The role of LCOSI is not to hold land, or to supersede the management directives of its individual partners, but rather, to create the common thread that binds future decision making to the shared goals of the

partnership and the benefit of the ecosystem as a whole. By mutual consent, the partners to the LCOSI [Memorandum of Understanding](#) agreed to participate in the preparation of the [Lake County Open Space Initiative Ecosystem Management Plan](#), and to use the consensus recommendations contained therein to help guide future planning decisions on subject Open Space lands under their jurisdiction.

The LCOSI Ecosystem Management Plan is a voluntary, consensus document, developed through cooperation between the agency land owners and the local community, to cross jurisdictional lines in establishing management emphasis areas for such varied uses as wildlife winter range, historic preservation, dispersed outdoor recreation, water storage, viewshed protection, habitat restoration, and water based recreation. Under this plan, the LCOSI partnership has created a 13 square mile landscape linkage spanning the Arkansas River between the Sawatch and Mosquito Mountain Ranges, securing traditional migration routes and winter range, and preserving the foreground viewsheds framing Colorado's two highest peaks.