

Colorado Sprawl Action Center's 4th Annual

SPRAWL OF SHAME

A survey of ten examples of sprawling development projects in Colorado in the year 2001 and the planning and development issues associated with those developments.

*A Report by the Colorado Sprawl Action Center
— a project of CoPIRG*

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a project of CoPIRG and the Colorado Public Interest Research Foundation

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With special thanks to:

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Friends of Black Forest Regional Park
Friends of the Animas Valley
Friends of the Foothills
John Himmelriech
Sheila Hanna and SEAQOL
Sierra Club – Poudre Canyon Chapter
SOLVE (Save Open Lands, Vistas and the Environment)

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Executive Summary

- ❖ **Colorado added over one million new residents between 1990 and 2000. More importantly, the average rate of increased land consumption was 2 to 4 times that of population increase.**
- ❖ **Colorado's population will continue to increase at a rapid rate. The estimated rates of population growth over the next twenty years in Front Range communities are 35% in Denver, 40% in Boulder, 50% in Colorado Springs, 60% in Fort Collins, and 70% in Greeley.¹**
- ❖ **Despite tremendous growth pressure, Colorado lacks binding master plans to direct growth, most communities lack the authority to make growth pay its own way, and there are few protections for valuable open space and agricultural lands.**

There is no denying that the population of Colorado is growing, or that it will continue to grow at a staggering rate. Colorado added over one million new residents between 1990 and 2000.² However, the real issue of concern is the proliferation of low-density sprawling developments. It is disturbing that when the figures for projected population growth are compared to projected land development over a twenty year period, most Front Range communities are planning to develop land at anywhere between two to four times the rate of population growth. For example, in the Denver metro area, population is projected to increase by more than 33% between 1995 and 2020.³ In that same time period, the amount of developed land is expected to grow by over 100%, or by over three times the amount of population growth.

Such sprawling development gobbles up open space, costs cities and counties millions of dollars in increased infrastructure costs, increases traffic congestion, destroys wildlife habitat, and generally threatens the very quality of life that brings so many newcomers to Colorado in the first place. Yet, Colorado lacks binding master plans to direct growth, most communities lack the authority to make growth pay its own way, and there are few protections for valuable open space and agricultural lands.

Polls continue to show that growth and sprawl issues are the top concern of Colorado's registered voters.⁴ The examples in this year's Sprawl of Shame showcase some of the experiences that have brought citizens to this point, including development decisions made with disregard for community-established plans and growth boundaries, taxpayer subsidies and burdens related to the projects, and consideration for the environment including open spaces and agricultural lands.

The 4th Annual Sprawl of Shame

What follows is a list of ten developments in various stages of proposal or development from communities all across the state that exemplify some of the ways our communities fail to

¹ Professor Tom Clark, "Growing in Colorado: How, Much, Where, and What Consequences?", 1999.

² 2000 U.S. Census

³ Clark.

⁴ For the best example, see the 2001 "Mind of Colorado" survey, Denver University. For others, contact CSAC.

properly manage growth. The criteria by which they were evaluated include, without limitation, whether the development:⁵

- ◆ **was in conflict with a community’s plan or expressed desires, including projects that fell outside an urban growth boundary or promoted further sprawl;**
- ◆ **burdened taxpayers through the increased costs of providing public services because the development was low density, far from existing development, increased traffic problems, or otherwise had significant impacts on public services; or**
- ◆ **destroyed open space or agricultural lands.**

Most of the developments inducted into the Sprawl of Shame were listed for a combination of these factors. For the various reasons outlined in the following summaries, these ten developments are all excellent examples of poor development decisions. Examined as a whole, they illustrate through their variety the most basic ways in which the current legal and political system in Colorado has failed to effectively deal with issues surrounding growth and development despite strong public concern regarding sprawl related issues.

This year’s developments (as well as those from earlier years, listed below for reference) all have been selected through a combination of these and other criteria, listed in the Research Methodology section at the end of this report.

Recommendations

At times the solutions for land use and planning questions can appear to be highly complex. In reality, some of the worst effects of sprawl can be prevented by the application of basic planning principles that can easily be incorporated into any town or county’s plan. The Colorado Sprawl Action Center and CoPIRG endorse the following policies to fight sprawl:

- 1. Redirect growth into existing urban areas through a combination of urban growth boundaries and stronger land-use planning;**
- 2. End taxpayer subsidies for sprawling developments, including roads and other services;**
- 3. Strengthen funding for and public ownership of threatened open spaces; and**
- 4. Support expanded funding for alternative transportation, including rail, bus, bicycle and pedestrian options. Fight beltways and other sprawl-causing highway projects.**

A variety of resources exist for both citizen groups and government agencies to use to defend their communities from poorly planned development proposals and to work toward meaningful, comprehensive plans that help ensure livable communities that do not suffer from some of the extremely costly and detrimental effects of sprawl. Many of these resources can either be found or are referenced on the Colorado Sprawl Action Center’s web site at www.sprawlaction.org.

⁵ For more information, see Methodology on page 14.

Previous Sprawl of Shame Reports

1999 Sprawl of Shame

Breckenridge Peak 7 Expansion

- Breckenridge, Summit County

Erie, CO Annexation

- Weld County

Glenview Subdivision

- Chaffee County

Happy Canyon Ranch

- Douglas County

Maher Ranch

- Castle Rock, Douglas County

Northwest Beltway

- Broomfield, Westminster, Arvada, Golden

Rooney Valley Mall

- Morrison, Jefferson County

Sanders Ranch

- Garfield County

TenEyck Property

- Jefferson County

Vauxmont

- Arvada, Jefferson County

2000 Sprawl of Shame

Aurora Annexation at Rockinghorse

- Aurora, Douglas County

Frost Creek

- Eagle County

Piano Creek Ranch

- Mineral County

Northgate Highlands

- Colorado Springs, El Paso County

The Northwest Beltway

- Jefferson County

Pioneer Hills

- Aurora, Arapahoe County

Rampart Range

- Lone Tree, Douglas County

River Canyon Development

- Douglas County

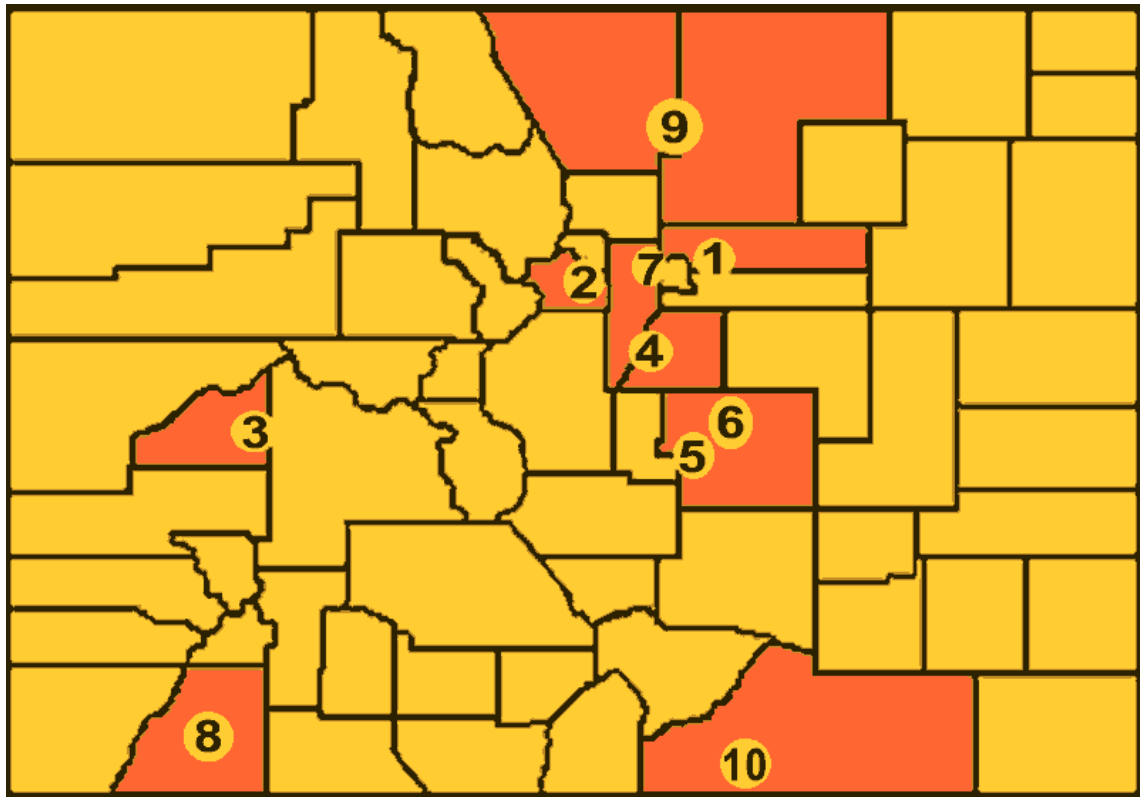
Telluride Valley Floor

- Telluride, San Miguel County

Todd Creek

- Adams County

SPRAWL OF SHAME



1. AURORA'S NORTHEAST EXPANSION
2. CLEAR CREEK HIGH SCHOOL
3. MINNESOTA ESTATES
4. RIVER CANYON
5. 'BROADMOOR'S ESTATES'
6. BLACK FOREST REGIONAL PARK
7. THE NORTHWEST BELTWAY
8. RIVER TRAILS RANCH
9. MCWHINNEY AT BERTHOUD & I-25
10. STONE RIDGE

AURORA'S NORTH-EASTERN EXPANSION

(ADAMS COUNTY - AURORA)

Sprawl Elements: Plans recently approved by city council call for and facilitate development far to the city's north east, pushing the urban footprint out by as far as 20 linear miles and extending over an area of approximately 40 square miles throughout the empty plains beyond E-470. Aurora is moving forward to develop this area, roughly the size of Lakewood, even as the city is struggling to provide services to existing development. At the same time, the fast-growing city is facing legal challenges and vocal opposition from government agencies and a variety of citizen groups concerned about development patterns.

History: Since 1987 the city has annexed over 10,000 acres of land (more than 12 square miles). Since 1990, population has increased 24% while building permits have increased 184% - over seven times the rate of population growth. A mid-2000 figure published by the city documented over 11.3 million square feet of retail space within the city of Aurora, equaling more than 43 square feet for every man, woman and child. During that time, "big-box" stores showed the highest vacancy rates in that category with more than 419,000 square feet sitting empty (not including parking lots). Nonetheless, the city has continued to issue approvals for more developments of this type (*all figures from the SEAQOL report "Planning For Disaster: One City's Approach to Growth Mis-Management"*). In the last year Aurora has been sued by at least two citizen groups and the governments of both Park County and Douglas County. Conflicts with Aurora and the city engineer of Bennett over their plan have led to harsh remarks and public accusations of impropriety.

Commentary: While Aurora's efforts to revitalize its urban areas (i.e. the mixed-use Fletcher Plaza infill development) are laudable, the city council continues to annex land and promote its development despite Aurora's increasing failure to adequately ensure even the most basic services to residents. From 1980 to 1999 fire personnel have experienced a 206% increase in calls, while the ratio of firemen city-wide has decreased from 1.18 to 1.04 per 1,000 residents (*all figures from the SEAQOL report "Planning For Disaster: One City's Approach to Growth Mis-Management"*). Heavy traffic from newly approved and built developments has overwhelmed their system, with a recent survey of the state's most dangerous intersections showing two of the top five located in Aurora. The oft-given justification for the rapid and publicly unpopular growth is that it increases tax revenue and quality of life for existing residents, yet last November Council referred an \$84.2 million bond issue to residents to help the city pay for such basic amenities as basic protection services, parkland, and a library. Aurora's ongoing inability to meet its citizens' needs shows that approving rapid growth does not necessarily either pay its own way or contribute to a higher quality of life for residents.

Where: Extending over approximately 40 square miles of open space and ranchland far East of E-470, the plans outline and facilitate development from Yale Ave. past 56th Ave (10 miles) and from Harvest out to Schumaker (11 miles) at their widest points. When built out, the developments there will encompass an area approximately equal to the current size of the city of Lakewood.

What: Completed zoning and development plans that pave the way for developing approximately 40 square miles of ranchland (the size of the current city of Lakewood).

Who: City of Aurora and the Aurora City Council.

Status: Most of the land in the area was annexed in 1987, though little work has been done on zoning review since that time. The final changes to the North East Plains Growth Study Plan were approved on July 9 of this year, and will help facilitate development anywhere within the 40 square mile area.



*The open plains east of Aurora along I-70.
Photo by Rob Gavrell.*

CLEAR CREEK HIGH SCHOOL

(CLEAR CREEK COUNTY)

Sprawl Elements: Clear Creek County School District has decided to move its current, centrally located Idaho Springs high school to an undeveloped meadow in unincorporated Clear Creek County. At its current location the school is co-located with a middle school, covered by town services and within walking / biking distance for many of its students and faculty. Fully two-thirds of the students live in Idaho Springs or towns further west. The new location would move the school seven miles further *east*, away from the majority of students and teachers. The move to the new location will force nearly all attendees to drive daily to a rural mountain community on the top of Floyd Hill, using narrow, winding, roads that are notoriously dangerous even in good weather.

History: Both the towns of Idaho Springs and Silver Plume signed resolutions asking the School District not to move the school out of Idaho Springs. In justifying the move, the School District has stated that it relied on an outdated federal standard that sets a minimum lot-size of 32 acres per school. Floyd Hill is already faced with water quality and quantity problems, which will only be exacerbated by this and other area-developments the school will likely encourage. The county has repeatedly asked voters to approve bonding for roads and bridges because of the difficulty they have had with funding their current level of requisite road maintenance and improvements, as well as adequately maintaining even such basic services as the sheriff's department.

Aside from the negative traffic, service-provision and open space issues of the move itself, the school's relocation is predictably creating an impetus for further sprawl. Adjacent landowner/developer Dave Williams plans to build 200 apartment units in the same remote area, and has remarked at public hearings that the success of the commercial portion of his project will be totally dependent on the relocation of the school. Now a second landowner is considering proposing a change in zoning for his property, to enable him to build a "Denver West-esque" office park with fast food restaurants to serve the high school. A water district and waste-water treatment plant have been proposed to accommodate all these projects, the added capacity from which would of course then generate further development pressures on the area.

Commentary: The Floyd Hill case clearly demonstrates how decisions regarding service locations can foster the promotion of sprawling development, divestment in existing urban centers, a drain on taxpayer money to provide the far-flung services, and needless destruction of wildlife habitat. At a time when many Clear Creek County municipalities are struggling to create viable economies, the decision to move the existing school to a far-flung rural open space has spawned a variety of sprawling development proposals.

Where: The top of Floyd Hill, approximately 7 miles east of Idaho Springs, along the I-70 corridor.

What: A 100,000 square foot high school on 32 acres of open space to accommodate 500-600 students (currently there are 325--it would take 50 years to fill up the high school to capacity at the current growth rate) and 200 apartment buildings on 16 acres – all far from and non-contiguous to any existing urban centers.

Who: Clear Creek County School District, and Dave Williams/Beaver Brook Land Company, LLC (land owner, developer).

Status: The high school is under construction, and the apartment complex has received preliminary County zoning and site plan approvals.



Construction on Clear Creek H.S., from Beaver Brook Canyon Rd.

MINNESOTA CREEK ESTATES

(DELTA COUNTY - PAONIA)

Sprawl Elements: While a project the size and scale of Minnesota Creek Estates might not turn heads along the fast growing Front Range, it was a major proposal for Delta County's rural, working class town of Paonia. The proposal included 34 houses on 16 acres in a field east of town. The land was not contiguous with town boundaries, but the Town Council approved a flagpole annexation, which would have pulled the land and the access road inside town boundaries. This action was undertaken in violation of the town's Comprehensive Plan, which recommends keeping the Minnesota Creek area open and rural, with a maximum of one house per 10 acres.

History: While the subdivision would have sent an estimated 340 car trips per day through Paonia's narrow streets, the town failed to produce a promised traffic study. Also problematic is Paonia's water supply. A water study commissioned by the town in 1999 has never been completed, but a draft of the study leaked to the public this spring warns of looming water shortages. Residents are at great risk of being stuck with the bill for new water storage facilities, widened access roads and basic services. Despite the fact that opponents packed public hearings and marshaled intense local opposition, the annexation proposal was approved this spring. Part of the public explanation given for the decision was that there had been an outpouring of letters written in support of the project, but none of these were disclosed following a later Freedom of Information Act request. A local group, the Concerned Citizens for Responsible Growth, collected enough signatures in just 24 hours to take the annexation to a referendum. The vote took place on July 31, and the council's annexation was overturned and the new zoning nullified by the majority vote.

Commentary: With only 1,400 residents located along remote State Highway 133 between Carbondale and Delta, even a smaller sized development such as this would have had a significant impact on the community of Paonia. The Minnesota Creek Estates project was conceived by local lumber yard owner Ken Byers, who served on the same town board that originally approved the Comprehensive Plan he then found himself asking the town to amend.

Where: East of the town of Paonia, in a secluded agricultural valley stretching up into the West Elk Wilderness area.

What: A 34-unit tract subdivision in a unincorporated Delta County, in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan and approved without traffic or water studies, despite local concerns.

Who: Lumber yard owner Ken Byers and the Mayor and Town Council of Paonia.

Status: A local group, the Concerned Citizens for Responsible Growth, collected enough signatures in just 24 hours to take the annexation to a referendum. The vote took place on July 31, and council's annexation was overturned and the new zoning nullified by the majority vote.



The proposed location for Minnesota Creek Estates.

RIVER CANYON DEVELOPMENT

(DOUGLAS COUNTY)

Sprawl Elements: The Douglas County Commissioners have approved an 18-hole golf course, 249 luxury home project located far from urban centers at the mouth of scenic Waterton Canyon. This auto-dependent, single family-home project will lie entirely outside Douglas County's DRCOG submitted urban growth boundary. Prior to the development's approval, the land was mostly zoned for agricultural use and listed as a protected area in the Douglas County Master Plan. Calculations based on Douglas County's own standards predict that this auto-dependent subdivision could generate as many as 2,500 car trips a day (not counting additional traffic generated by the golf course). This additional traffic will no doubt help to spur commercial strip mall development along the remote county roads and open spaces that separate the area from the metro region.

History: Area residents and nature lovers have been fighting the River Canyon development for years. The citizen group fighting the proposal even raised \$4 million to purchase the land and protect it as open space, but the offer was rejected by the landowner. In February, the project's public comment meeting drew 180 people, virtually all of whom expressed their opposition to the project. In addition, nine thousand people signed a petition to keep the land as open space. These signatures were presented at a county commissioners' meeting, where public testimony against the project lasted for over five hours. Despite this outpouring of public opposition, River Canyon was approved by County Commissioners in May.

Commentary: While over the course of the three-year fight the developer has made some good concessions to citizen concerns, the project clearly lies outside the DRCOG submitted urban growth boundary and would increase traffic in the area. In time the beautiful drive out to Waterton Canyon and Roxborough State Park will fill up with chain stores and gas stations, as has already begun to serve the residents of the equally far flung Roxborough Village and Roxborough Park developments. Following the pattern of so many other far-flung sprawling developments, the project's approval will itself contribute to the destruction of the open spaces that had originally lured the new residents to their remote homes in the first place.

Where: 3 miles southwest of Chatfield Reservoir at the entrance to Waterton Canyon.

What: A development of 249 single-family luxury homes and an 18 hole golf course.

Who: Redstone Development Services -River Canyon LLC, and Douglas County.

Status: The development was recommended for approval by the Planning Department and unanimously approved by the Douglas County commissioners in May.



*The River Canyon site from the air.
Photo by Rob Gavrell.*

'BROADMOOR'S ESTATES'

(EL PASO COUNTY – COLORADO SPRINGS)

Sprawl Elements: As many as 5,000 buildings and dwellings in the Colorado Springs area were granted permits despite evidence of moderate to extreme geological hazards in their immediate area. The City Council's reluctance to mandate or enforce adequate geologic hazard studies from developers has led to financial ruin for some homeowners, and created a constant stream of costly repairs for impacted city services. Leading to an extreme instance of both public and private subsidy of ill-planned developments, the city's own Office of Emergency Management estimates that in 1999 alone, homeowners city wide suffered anywhere from \$40 million to \$88 million in damage from moving soils.

History: Since the first research in 1968, studies of the Broadmoor Region have found evidence of instability. A partial list of regional surveys compiled by local geologist John Himmelreich identifies dozens of landslides, and recommends against building on the sites. In 1974 a federally funded study identified landslide sites throughout Colorado Springs and specifically recommended that, "building and road construction be prohibited in landslide hazard areas." Despite these warnings and demonstrated problems with houses and infrastructure in the area, the city of Colorado Springs approved new construction in the area as recently as last April. This winter, a city water main in the area ruptured due to shifting soils, and last summer portions of the Broadmoor Golf Course were closed.

Landslides in the area have cracked roadways, broken utilities, tilted trees, buckled tennis courts and driveways, and ripped houses in half. Five area homes have been condemned and at least two dozen more are damaged or threatened. Nonetheless, homes in the neighborhood and others like them around Colorado Springs continue to be approved despite evidence of danger.

Commentary: The city has no geologist on staff qualified to review developer sponsored site surveys. Those few surveys that are forwarded on by the city to the Colorado Geological Survey (CGS) for review and comment are often found to be inaccurate or incomplete. However, the city maintains that its "honor" system is adequate and staunchly resists finding geologic warnings of any kind to be valid justification for denying building permits. In the meantime, CGS and other experts have identified numerous geologically unstable areas throughout the city - as many as 5,000 homes have been built on potentially landslide-susceptible slopes.

Where: The Broadmoor Region is located in the southwest corner of the Colorado Springs metro area. Geologists have identified at least eighteen metro-area locales with active landslide problems - five in the Broadmoor Region, eight in the Garden of the Gods vicinity, two in Rockrimmon, and three in Pinecliff.

What: A pattern of development approval in the face of accumulated evidence of geologic hazards and a lengthy history of landslides and destruction – leading to subsidization of ill-planned and dangerous development by both the public and private sector.

Who: Many developers have proposed projects or built on landslide areas, including Schuck Communities, Cog Land and Development Company, and Gates Land Company. Construction projects at these locations and others with similar safety concerns have been consistently approved by the City Council of Colorado Springs.

Status: Surveys indicate hundreds of acres of distinct landslide areas in the Broadmoor Region. Further construction in this area was approved last April and at other similar sites as recently as last December. To date, FEMA has provided monies to purchase 25 houses in eight "disaster sites" in Colorado Springs, at a gross taxpayer expense of \$4.1 million.



*The Garrison residence, a 1996-house ripped from its foundations and condemned.
Photo courtesy of John Himmelreich*

BLACK FOREST REGIONAL PARK

(EL PASO COUNTY)

Sprawl Elements: Recently the El Paso County Planning Commission voted to change the zoning on an 805 acre parcel of land north of the Black Forest Regional Park to allow for a new, auto-dependent subdivision far from any urban center. In addition, the developer of the proposed subdivision has requested, and the El Paso County Planning Commission has agreed, to extend Milam Road north of Shoup Road through the western portion of the Black Forest Park itself, to serve as the main entrance to the proposed new subdivision.

History: Black Forest Regional Park is a 240 acre park located north of Colorado Springs in the Black Forest area of El Paso County. Currently, the only road within the park boundary is for access to the perimeter parking lots, allowing the Black Forest to function as the only “landlocked” park in northern El Paso County that affords a serene, quiet, and safe refuge for hikers, bikers, equestrians, and wildlife.

The Park was transferred to El Paso County from the U.S. Forest Service in September of 1999. The parkland was transferred in 2 pieces, an 80 acre parcel and a 160 acre parcel. This southern 80 acre parcel of parkland was purchased by the County from the Forest Service for \$320,000 under the terms of the Sisk Act, which is a Federal Statute that allows parklands to be conveyed to local governments under the simple requirement that they continue to be used for the same purposes.

The County Planning Commission is asking the Board of County Commissioners to approve the construction of a road through the park, which a local citizen group alleges is in violation of the terms of the Sisk Act. The planning commission is also recommending a 120 foot right-of-way be reserved, to allow for Milam Road to become a major thoroughfare if future development demands.

Commentary: The proposed road will encourage additional sprawling, auto-dependent development at the expense of existing park lands.

Where: 10 miles North of the City of Colorado Springs in northern El Paso County, at the intersection of Shoup Road and Milam Road.

What: A 120’ Right-of-Way, with a 60’ road constructed through the Black Forest Regional Park.

Who: Kings Deer Development and the El Paso County Planning Commission.

Status: A non-profit group, Friends of Black Forest Regional Park, has filed suit against the Board of County Commissioners of El Paso County basing their lawsuit on the terms of the Federal Sisk Act. The Friends believe that the Sisk Act prohibits the Commissioners from changing the use of this land. The court case is pending, with a hearing scheduled in August.



*Entrance to the Black Forest Regional Park (sign reads: “No Motorized Vehicles”)
Photo courtesy of Gary Schinderle and the Friends of Black Forest Regional Park*

THE NORTHWEST BELTWAY

(JEFFERSON COUNTY)

Sprawl Elements: While urban beltways typically are marketed as solutions to traffic congestion, it has been consistently demonstrated that they induce further congestion by providing new access to open greenfields far from urban centers, inevitably driving development patterns further to the fringe. Due to their location and size, over the long term these developments contribute to longer commutes, a worsening of air quality, increased traffic, destruction of vast tracks of open space, and increased water consumption. More than almost any other single project included in the Sprawl of Shame, the final loop of the Northwest Parkway threatens to encourage additional sprawl.

History: Despite assurances by its creators to the contrary, already constructed segments of the beltway have fostered new and sprawling developments. This final segment has been touted by the cities of Arvada and Broomfield as the best solution for regional traffic woes, though this position is directly contrary to the findings of last year's extensive Northwest Quadrant Transportation Feasibility Study (NWQTFS). The study concluded that the \$500 million dollar project would not reduce traffic in the region nearly as cheaply or efficiently as simply improving the local, existing transportation infrastructure.

Since last year's listing in the Sprawl of Shame, the city of Arvada and CDOT director Tom Norton have openly disregarded the NWQTFS study, and instead commissioned new taxpayer funded studies. Their proposed alternative includes routes over the soon-to-be Wildlife Refuge of Rocky Flats. It should also be noted that while spending the money to study and then re-study the Beltway option, Arvada has neglected to commit to even the most cursory improvements along ailing Indiana Ave, casting doubt about its ability to manage even its existing transit infrastructure, let alone a regional tollway.

Commentary: Everywhere the Denver beltway has been built it has spurred new sprawl. Along the northern reaches of E-470 you'll see sign after sign announcing new and proposed sprawling developments popping up all along the urban fringe (*for an example, see [Aurora's North East Expansion](#) entry in this report*). This entry marks the third consecutive year that this highly contested sprawl inducing highway project has appeared on the Sprawl of Shame.

What / Where: The Jefferson County segment of the metro beltway, connecting I-70 with C-470 through Jefferson County.

Who: Main proponents of the final segments include the City of Arvada, the Jefferson County commissioners and CDOT Director Tom Norton.

Status: The Northwest Quadrant Transportation Feasibility study concluded the remaining portion was not needed and not cost effective as a solution to alleviate traffic. Not content with these results CDOT and Arvada have both commissioned studies to *re-study* the option.



RIVER TRAILS RANCH

(LA PLATA COUNTY - DURANGO)

Sprawl Elements: A proposed development of either 650 housing units subject to annexation by Durango or, in the alternative, a gated community of around 50 houses to be approved under county regulations, all located on 240 acres of rural land located miles from the City of Durango in the Animas Valley. Either project would have residents commuting 10-15 miles round-trip daily along the narrow county roads and city streets to reach the main commercial centers on the opposite side of town. The project would be permanently separated from the city by several large holdings under conservation easements. Finally, due to the distance from existing town resources, Durango's taxpayers could be negatively impacted by the city's spending more on roads leading to the development and providing the requisite utilities and emergency services to an area relatively far removed from the urban core.

History: River Trails Ranch was first proposed by developer Bob Wolff as a project of up to 650 housing units on 240 acres of rural land known as the Kroeger Ranch. Recently Wolff has discussed subdividing the Kroeger Ranch into 3-acre lots, reportedly a gated community of around 50 houses. The River Trails Ranch proposal first caught the public eye in March of this year, when an informational meeting was held and dozens of citizens spoke against the project. Out of the desire to plan for a better community and preserve their area's open spaces, Friends of Animas Valley was formed shortly thereafter. They have successfully organized a great deal of citizen opposition to the River Trails project through letters, petitions, and yard signs. At the same time, alternative solutions to the development have been proposed, including one by Durango Herald columnist Mark Pearson to allow the landowner to profit from the sale of a few prized lots while devoting most of the land to conservation.

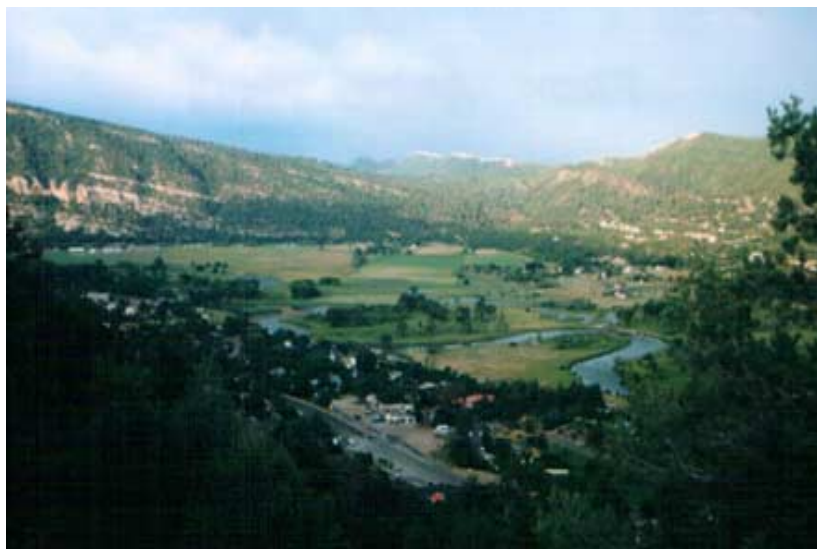
Commentary: The Animas Valley north of Durango contains some the area's most scenic open spaces – serving as a home and playground to elk herds, road bikers, rock climbers, and nature lovers. The fact that the site is miles from the city center, across town from the main commercial areas, and buffered from the town by a swath of protected open spaces, all contribute to this site's being an inappropriate location for any kind of development that would hope to benefit Durango's community, or preserve the beauty and tourist appeal of the Animas Valley.

Where: 240 acres of the Animas Valley, north of Durango.

Who: Bob Wolff of Durango Development Inc.

What: Two separate plans, one for city annexation and up to 650 housing units, and one for houses on 3-acre lots outside city limits.

Status: At the developer's request, the first public hearing and proposal have been indefinitely postponed. The developer has requested the city publicly state their support for annexation of the site, though Council Members have replied such a statement would be premature and have expressed possible interest in revisiting the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that it more accurately respects the vision existing residents have for their community and future. In late June, Wolff approached La Plata County planners to



discuss the proposal for 3-acre lots.

*Kroeger Ranch from Animas Mountain.
Photo courtesy of Jon Broholm and the Friends of the Animas Valley*

MCWHINNEY AT BERTHOUD & THE I-25 CORRIDOR PLAN

(LARIMER AND WELD COUNTIES)

Sprawl Elements: McWhinney Enterprises is hoping to begin construction on a 1,600 acre development at Interstate 25 and Hwy 56, for which they were approved a flagpole annexation to the town of Berthoud. Development is stalled, however, by a 5% growth-rate cap passed by Berthoud citizens last November who intended to prevent exactly that type of sprawling growth. Recently the McWhinneys have succeeded in putting an item on the upcoming town ballot that would exempt the Berthoud Interstate Corridor from the growth cap.

In this same northern front-range area, rapid development has prompted local governments to put together the I-25 Corridor Plan for a 30-mile stretch of Interstate 25 to set design standards, create parallel road systems, and set up a task force to study the open space issues. While the detailed “road” element of the plan already has a regional transportation tax funding mechanism in mind, the “land-use” elements (open lands, clustered development, alternative transportation, agricultural preservation) remain only non-binding vision statements that even now developments and actions like those of the McWhinneys threaten to render irrelevant within only a few years.

History: McWhinney Enterprises has been busy transforming the landscape of the northern stretch of I-25 for years. Their portfolio showcases both an auto-dependent outlet mall at the intersection of I-25 and Hwy 34, and the recently approved, taxpayer-subsidized “Centerra” project – 4,148 dwelling units on 1,870 acres, including a “global technology center” which will eventually extend along over 4 solid miles of I-25. “Centerra,” when completed, will have received substantial incentives from the city of Loveland, including limited requirements to pay for significant projected traffic impacts and 25-year vested rights (basically an abnegation of government oversight on the project).

The McWhinneys are the largest of a number of developers who are turning their interests toward northern Interstate 25 to take advantage of the eagerness of local municipalities there to approve massive development projects and transportation-corridor sprawl. Recent articles in the Denver Post (“I-25 North: Road to Growth,” 4/22/01) and other publications have pointed out the degree to which northern metro area towns are well poised to repeat the mistakes of their southern neighbors and approve exactly the types of sprawling, auto-dependent and expensive developments that will lead to the same financial and traffic problems that many Denver area communities are now experiencing.

Commentary: This development runs directly counter to the sentiment expressed by voters who approved the Berthoud growth cap. On a larger scale, as development pressures move north along the I-25 corridor, it becomes increasingly important that northern metro area municipalities learn from the mistakes of their southern neighbors in terms of how *not* to fail to manage and regulate growth. In order to effectively protect citizens from the negative impacts of sprawling development, the inter-governmental plan regulating growth in the corridor needs to include enforcement mechanisms to ensure adequate smart-growth practices, community planning and open space protections take place in this quickly sprawling region.

Where: Interstate 25 along the Northern Front Range between Berthoud and Fort Collins.

What: McWhinney's Berthoud plans call for development of 1,600 acres at the Berthoud and I-25 Interchange. The I-25 Corridor Plan is a laudable effort at intergovernmental agreement, but does not include any legally-enforceable smart growth components. Without them the plan serves as little more than a vision statement for the region—a vision statement that current practices are largely ignoring in favor of sprawling, auto-dependent development complexes.

Who: The possible Berthoud / I-25 development and ballot initiative to exempt it from the local growth cap are projects of McWhinney Enterprises. The local governments of Fort Collins, Larimer Co., Weld Co., Berthoud, Timnath, Johnstown, Windsor, Loveland, and the Colorado Department of Transportation, and North Front Range Transportation and Air Quality Planning Council are collaborating on the I-25 Corridor Plan.

Status: McWhinney's Berthoud development plans are still uncertain, pending the result of this November's vote to exempt their project from Berthoud's growth cap. Five of the eight local governments involved have already voted to approve the I-25 Corridor Plan.

STONE RIDGE SUBDIVISION

(LAS ANIMAS COUNTY - TRINIDAD)

Sprawl Elements: A single, 2.3 square mile residential golf course development recently conditionally approved by City Council will increase both the size and population of small, rural Trinidad by 40%. Located on the northeast edge of town, the 1,500 acre planned development at places extends over two miles beyond the city limits (the city is only a few miles wide at its widest). Requiring a series of six annexations to bring it within the purview of the city, the proposal calls for 1,670 housing units to hold approximately 4,200 people. There has been no planning for expanded commercial development and the developer has assuaged the city's concerns by billing the development as a retirement community, where not having the requisite numbers of new jobs shouldn't be as problematic. Conflicting studies by the developer and a citizen group show that traffic impacts, water requirements and new school facilities will either be of no concern, in the case of the former, or tremendous worry, in that case of the latter. Neither the City of Trinidad nor Las Animas County have any sort of comprehensive growth plans or intergovernmental agreements to deal with growth.

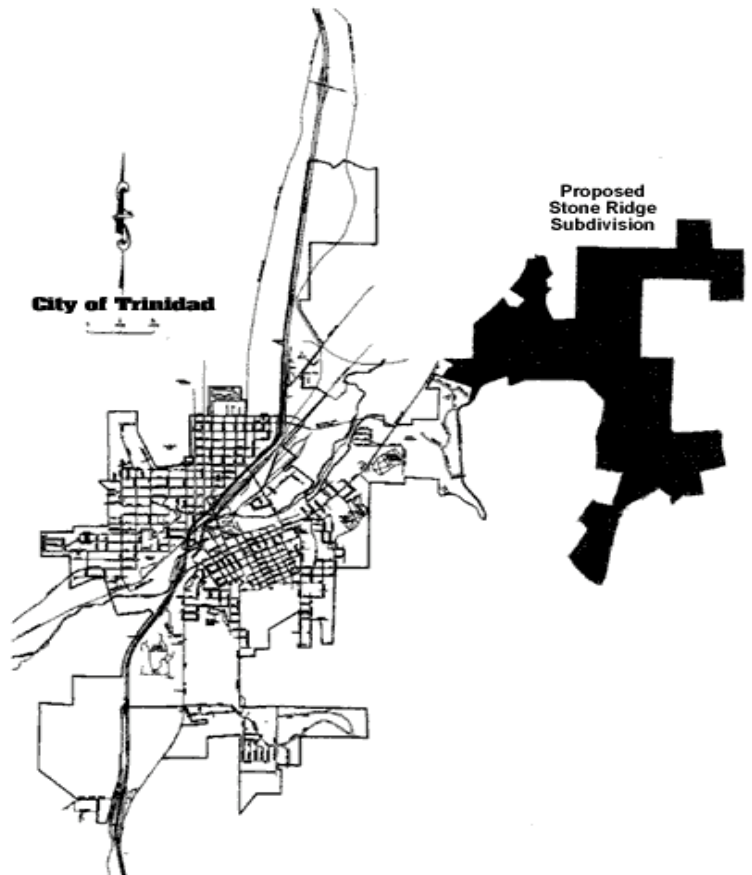
History: At the time of its introduction to the city, various members of the planning staff and council felt the proposal was being "rushed through," which the developer admits was the case in order to circumvent possible restrictions should Amendment 24 have passed. Adding to concerns, years ago developer Pete Schrepfer also oversaw the planning and approval of the somewhat controversial Pinon Terrace development project which, after over eight years of waiting, has only recently received paved roads. Since its initial proposal, a local citizens group has fought the Stone Ridge development plan for months, voicing concerns over schools, traffic impacts, and the cost and availability of water and sewer services.

Where: Touching on the northeast corner of Trinidad, extending in parts over 2 miles from the city limits, over 1,500 acres of greenfield open spaces and ranchland.

What: Approximately 1,670 residential units, a golf course, and senior center.

Who: Developer Pete Schrepfer and the City of Trinidad.

Status: The council of Trinidad has given preliminary approval to both the annexation and rezoning of the land, subject to the successful fulfillment of 25 conditions placed upon the developer. Upon successful completion of the conditions, the annexation will become final.



Report Methodology

The Colorado Sprawl Action Center and CoPIRG gathered nominees for the 2001 Sprawl of Shame through our ongoing outreach and networking with dozens of local citizen groups, homeowners' associations, local government officials, and planning and legal experts working on land use issues across the state.

Nominees were evaluated based on a number of criteria including:

- efficiency/appropriateness of land use -i.e., whether development was in conflict with local plans or desires, fell within a growth boundary [if applicable], were of appropriate density and contiguous to existing development, contained mixed land uses, etc.;
- transportation -whether development reinforced automobile dependence without offering alternative transportation possibilities, generated a significant amount of traffic, etc.;
- community character/reception to development - i.e., design went against the community's character, created cookie-cutter tract housing, development was located on top of areas of geologic or historical significance, development was approved over substantial citizen protest, etc.;
- environment - i.e., development threatened to destroy open space (including critical wildlife habitat or corridors) or agricultural lands, worsened air or water quality, etc.; and
- taxpayer subsidies - whether the development paid its fair share of costs for infrastructure and requisite public services.

The report authors sought to highlight developments that exhibited a range of sprawling traits and drew a picture of development patterns from various regions of Colorado.

All information and statements contained within the report are accurate to the best of our knowledge and have been reasonably confirmed to the best of our abilities. As we narrowed the list of potential nominees, we contacted city and county planning departments and agencies to gather a range of viewpoints and to verify the facts.

The Sprawl of Shame is not intended in any way to serve as a listing of the ten "worst" developments in Colorado, but merely to act as a survey of examples of developments which, each in their own way, exemplify aspects of the phenomena commonly known as "sprawl." In so doing, they are each representative of overall development patterns by which many polls have indicated the vast majority of Colorado residents remain intensely concerned.

About Us

A report by the Colorado Sprawl Action Center, a project of the *CoPIRG* and the *Colorado Public Interest Research Foundation*.

About the Sprawl of Shame

In this, its fourth annual incarnation, the Sprawl of Shame report is designed to bring to light specific developments around the state of Colorado that are particularly indicative of poor development decisions. Poor development decisions are defined as developments that are in conflict with a local plan, whose overall impact and / or design injure the public welfare by being particularly traffic generating or auto dependent, unduly injurious to open space and agricultural lands (including local habitat and wild life), outside of existing growth boundaries or non-contiguous to existing growth areas, or designed in such a way that they are subsidized by taxpayers and existing residents. In short, if they contribute to the overall pattern of “sprawl” in Colorado and approval is, therefore, contrary to the best interests of both the general public and the natural and social landscape of the state of Colorado.

About the Colorado Sprawl Action Center

The Colorado Sprawl Action Center was formally started in June 1999, picking up from what was formerly called the Colorado Network to Stop Sprawl. Like it’s predecessor, the Colorado Sprawl Action Center works to improve the development process by providing citizens with the organizational tools and information they need to be long-term advocates for progressive development in their respective communities. It is our belief there is no substitute for an educated and activated local public. The crucial element to solving the problems related to sprawl is the creation of an effective local base of support for land use reform.

About CoPIRG

The Colorado Public Interest Research Groups Citizen Lobby (CoPIRG) advocates for the public interest. CoPIRG uncovers threats to public health and well-being and fights to end them, using the time tested tools of investigative research, media exposes, grassroots organizing and litigation. CoPIRG’s mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects our environment, encourages a fair and sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

About CoPIRF

Over the past 16 years, the Colorado Public Interest Research Foundation (CoPIRF) has been known for its relentless and effective dedication to research, education and consensus-building on environmental, consumer and democracy issues, and the influence that certain special interests have gained on decision-making in those realms. Primarily engaged in the land-use issue, CoPIRF’s strategy has consisted of shining the light of public scrutiny on decision makers, corporations and other organizations making choices that affect the quality of life of the citizens of Colorado. CoPIRF was founded in 1984 as a sister organization to CoPIRG Citizen Lobby.