

County declines GOCO's request to submit application for Lone Rock Ranch purchase

By Lynda James Senior correspondent | Posted: Thursday, March 15, 2018 2:23 pm

After wanting to purchase Lone Rock Ranch east of Crow Hill for two years, Park County commissioners had to turn down Great Outdoors Colorado's request to submit a full 2018 application. (See March 2 Flume article.)

This was the second time the county had written a concept paper to be considered. The 2017 paper was not chosen to submit a grant application.

The commissioners decision was made March 7 after learning another party had until April 3 to finalize a purchase contract.

The county's offer would not be considered until after April 3.

"I'm very disappointed. It's one of the last large (undeveloped) parcels that contain an elk corridor," Commissioner Mike Brazell said.

"I'm disappointed, too. I hope whoever buys it is mindful of the community's wants and desires," Commissioner Dick Elsner said.

According to a March 7 memo from Park County Recreation Director Gary Nichols, Park County's was one of five concept papers chosen to submit a GOCO grant application.

Several other factors also led to the commissioners' decision not to submit an application.

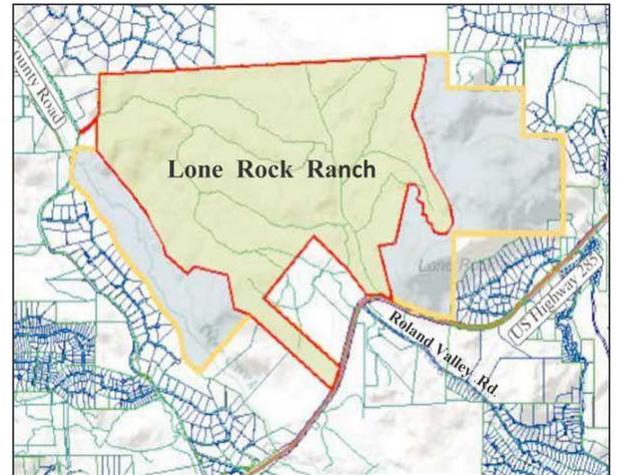
Nichols's memo stated GOCO was concerned that Colorado Parks and Wildlife's \$2 million commitment was tentative, at best, and may not be available when needed.

GOCO expressed that it wanted another financial partner, but to date Nichols had not found one.

The grant deadline is April 20, just two weeks after the April 3 sales contract deadline.

Writing a successful grant application would take a considerable amount of time in March before the April 3 sales contract deadline. That may be time spent in vain.

"To remain in good standing with GOCO, the county should let them know immediately if we intend to withdraw, so they can invite another project to apply before the April 20 deadline," Nichols wrote.



Request Withdrawn

Park County commissioners declined a Great Outdoors' Colorado request to submit a grant application for purchase of the Lone Rock Ranch March 7. Both blue areas outlined in orange on the map contain a conservation easement. The middle green section is meadow and forest with several tributaries of Roland Creek. U.S. Highway 285 is the thick reddish line running from the lower left to the upper right. (Courtesy of Park County)

Nichols also wrote that he had serious reservations about pursuing the purchase at this time.

“I appreciated all of Gary’s hard work on this. We don’t want to hurt our relationship with GOCO,” Commissioner Mark Dowaliby said.

The 2,397-acre ranch has been on the market since 2007.

The county purchased 270 acres on the west side of the ranch and five acre feet of water rights January 2017.

About 1.5 miles of Deer Creek runs through the property the county purchased.

The property contains a conservation easement that limits recreation to passive activities, and no structures can be built. Picnic tables and benches are allowed in the easement.

The \$1,389,736 price tag was taken from the one percent county sales tax called the Land and Water Trust Fund.

At that time, the LWTF board recommended, with a 5 to 2 vote, that the county not purchase the ranch due to the high purchase price for the land and water.

After the county’s purchase, 2,127 acres and about 12 acre feet of water rights were still available for purchase.

The Lone Rock outcrop is on the east side of the property, with 572 acres in a conservation easement and can’t be developed. It is owned by Lone Rock Ranch, LLC.

The two conservation easements were placed on the Deer Creek and Lone Rock parcels in 2005.

The remaining 1,555 acres are owned by the Dozier Family Trust, LLC. Roland Creek, its tributaries and several small ponds exist on that parcel.

The Dozier family has retained 160 acres on the southern end adjacent to U.S. 285.

Conservation trust fund grants awarded

The commissioners awarded four entities conservation trust fund grants May 8.

The CTF is Colorado lottery funds that are dispersed to each county, town, parks and recreation district and metro district that provides recreation facilities in the state.

Total dispersed to all Park County qualifying entities over the past five years is almost \$833,000, according to Colorado Department of Local Affairs website, www.colorado.gov/dola.

County Manager Tom Eisenman said Park County government usually receives around \$130,000 per year.

Funds must be spent on property that is owned by a local government agency. Nonprofits who manage a government-owned site may apply, but money cannot go directly to the nonprofit per state rules.

Funds may be spent to purchase, develop and maintain new conservation sites, such as open space, conservation easements, historic sites, natural areas and habitat.

Funds can also be spent on capital improvements and maintenance of public recreation sites.

The definition of recreation sites is broadly interpreted by the state. For example, libraries, museums and community gardens are eligible recreation sites.

Definitions of capital improvements and maintenance are strictly interpreted by the state.

Replacing items such as base balls, bats and similar equipment are not considered capital improvements or a maintenance item.

Capital improvements must be a fixed permanent asset used to maintain or improve recreation on the site. Renting items like port-a-potties are not allowed, but the expense of installing a bathroom is allowed.

Maintenance does not include monthly expenses that don't keep the site from decline, such as a monthly electricity bill.

Maintenance items such as mowing expenses and replacing gravel on a playground are allowed.

Each year, Park County awards some funding as grants and retains some funds for repairs and maintenance of sites owned by Park County, such as community centers.

Park County must report all CTF projects and expenditures to the state.

If funds are spent on ineligible projects or improvements, the county must reimburse the state.

2018 CTF applications

This year, six entities applied for a total of \$95,367. Four were funded for a total of \$42,462.

Two applications contained some items that are not allowed. When contacted by the advisory board, both entities removed the items from their applications.

A letter to the commissioners from the advisory board chair Kristen Ellis stated the state CFT administrator verified the items were not eligible.

Applications for funding were awarded to the Park County Livestock Committee, Friends of the Hartsel Library, Platte Canyon School District and Lake George Community Association.

The livestock committee was awarded \$6,668 to purchase livestock panels to build additional pens for animals during the fair, other animal events and animals evacuated during an emergency such as a wildfire.

Livestock committee members will truck the panels from Big R in Conifer to the fairgrounds as an in-kind match for the CTF grant.

The Hartsel library was awarded \$7,719 to replace broken flooring tiles, refurbish the 1899 original floors in the historic library and repair the heating system.

The site is owned by the Hartsel Fire Protection District. The Friends will provide \$1,000 in matching funds and in-kind labor to box the library's contents for storage while the floors are under construction.

The Platte Canyon schools received \$20,000 to replace the 30-year-old inefficient boiler and add an aqua heat exchanger at the Marge E. Hudak Pool to keep the water warm.

Matching funds of \$7,594 will be provided by the school and Friends of the Hudak Pool. In-kind labor of \$1,500 will be donated by the Friends.

The Lake George association was awarded \$8,075 to reconstruct the arena's announcing booth, purchase a new scoreboard, add pea gravel at the playground and park maintenance, such as mowing, septic pumping, trash removal and rest room cleaning.

The association is providing \$1,150 in cash and \$2,000 of in-kind labor.

Two applications were not funded. The advisory board said both were good projects, but they didn't meet CTF criteria.

The American Legion application was for property owned by a non-profit organization and therefore not eligible for funds.

All CFT advisory board members expressed regret that remodeling the Legion Hut bathrooms and deck to meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility could not be funded with CTF funds. The request was for \$22,400.

The \$25,000 application from South Park Schools Foundation was very incomplete and lacked a clear, understandable budget.

The application did not detail any specifics on how the CTF money would be spent as required by law.

It stated funds would be used to build soccer and baseball fields at the athletic complex in Fairplay. It also stated that a \$300,000 grant application was submitted through major league baseball.

The school foundation did not respond to the Conservation Trust Fund advisory board's request for more information and clarity.

Vouchers

Vouchers for \$186,954 were approved, with the general fund spending \$99,726.

The two funds with the next highest expenditures were public works at \$35,642 and fleet at \$31,538.

The county grant fund spent \$9,466. Capital expenditures spent \$6,598. Human Services expenses were \$3,138.

Funds spending less than \$100 were the conservation trust, sales tax trust and E-911 authority.

Note: the author is a board member of the Land and Water Trust Fund and Conservation Trust Fund.