

# A Community Vision for Fisher's Peak Ranch

# Envisioning a Future for Fisher's Peak Ranch

After putting the Crazy French Ranch under contract in Dec 2018, the Trust For Public Land (TPL) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in partnership with the City of Trinidad, launched the "Fisher's Peak Ranch Visioning Project". The project aimed to build awareness of the ranch purchase and its eventual transfer to public ownership and to solicit the community's ideas for how to shape the future use and protection of Trinidad's beloved peak and property.

The community engagement included a public meeting and presentation, coffee chats, meetings and calls, social media outreach, a brainstorm session with Fisher's Peak Elementary School's fourth and fifth graders and a Great Outdoors Colorado-sponsored celebration. As a result, over 400 people shared their vision for the future of Fisher's Peak Ranch.

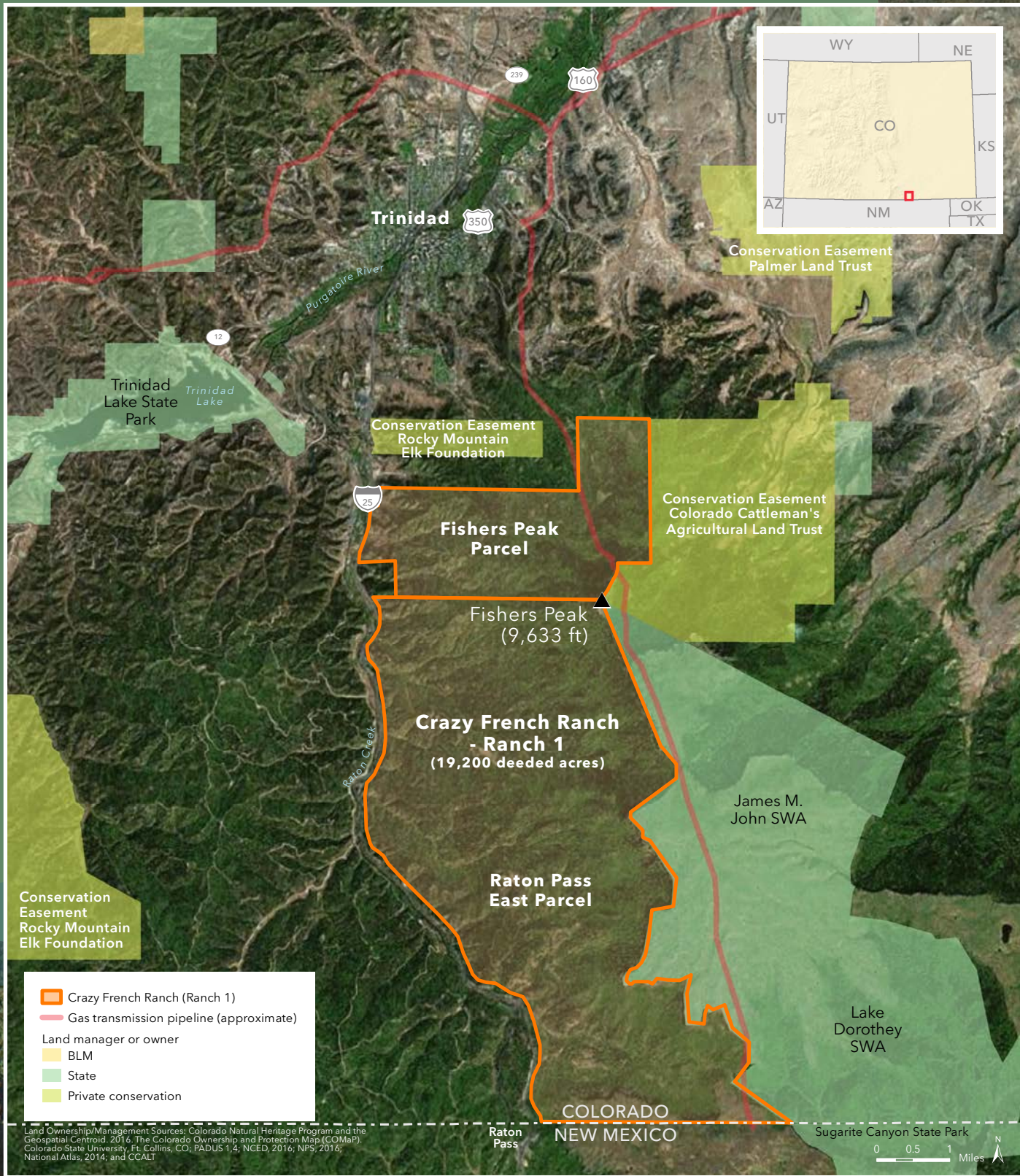
**This report** reflects the Trinidad community's ideas, hopes and dreams for Fisher's Peak Ranch and how it will be managed by project partner Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). A community's vision that establishes a foundation for future management planning efforts.

*The Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, and the City of Trinidad led the effort to collect the community's input.*

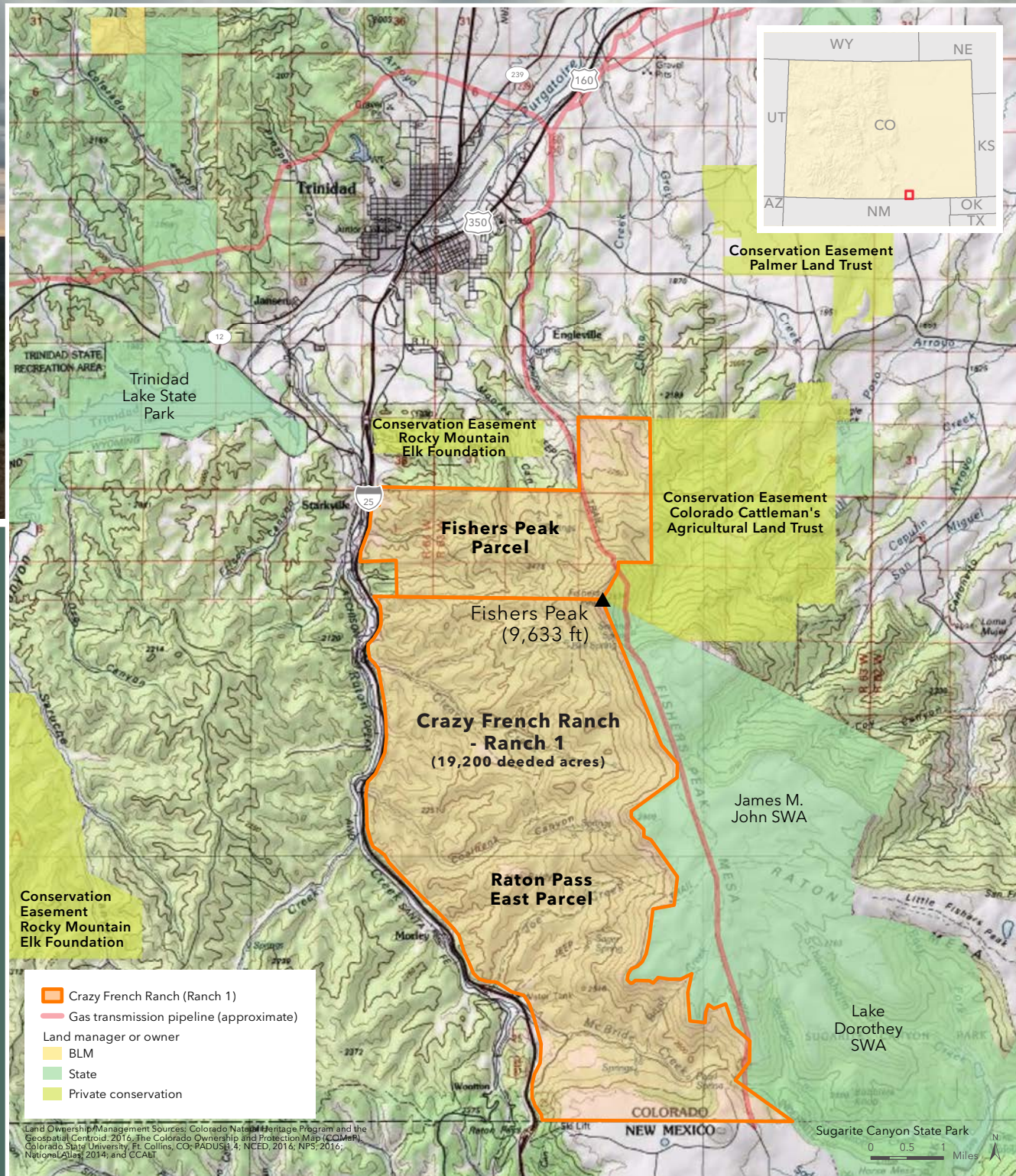
THE  
TRUST  
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The Nature  
Conservancy 





Land Ownership/Management Sources: Colorado Natural Heritage Program and the Geospatial Centroid, 2016; The Colorado Ownership and Protection Map (COMaP), Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO; PADUS 1.4; NCED, 2016; NPS, 2016; National Atlas, 2014; and CCAIT





“This is a golden opportunity that the whole town will jump at.”

*Trinidad resident*

# A Unique Conservation Opportunity

**Fisher’s Peak Ranch** presents an exciting opportunity to achieve landscape-level conservation, marry that conservation with recreation and connect many more people to Colorado’s outdoors.

**Protection of the Ranch** will positively impact critical ecosystems, wildlife, as well as, Trinidad’s cultural and economic vitality. The 19,200-acre property connects grasslands to the east with foothills and mountains to the west, serving as a corridor for wildlife movement. Providing habitat for large native species like elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, mountain lion, and black bear, the property helps maintain important connections between their populations in the mountains and those in the prairies.

**Fisher’s Peak Ranch** will offer outstanding public access to nature. Trinidad’s iconic, 9,633-foot Fisher’s Peak will finally be accessible from Colorado. Additionally, combining Fisher’s Peak Ranch with CPW’s adjacent James M. John State Wildlife Area (SWA) (8,200-acres), Lake Doherty SWA (4,500-acres) and Sugarite Canyon State Park (3,600-acres) will result in a massive increase in the amount of conveniently accessed public land around Trinidad and create opportunities for a broad spectrum of year-round recreational opportunities at one of the main gateways to Colorado.



# Shared Values

A **spirit of excitement** pervaded the Fisher's Peak Ranch visioning project meetings, phone calls, brainstorming, coffee chats and social media comments. Again and again, residents voiced their support for the protection of the property and appreciation for the opportunity to access it in the near future. One meeting participant poignantly captured this community sentiment when she said she was *“touched that [Fisher's Peak Ranch] will be part of our legacy and in public ownership.”*



**“Students in Trinidad don’t go on field trips in the outdoors - they just don’t do that anymore. Our ancestors know about the land and the outdoors, but we don’t. This is an opportunity to reconnect with our roots.”**

*Trinidad high school student*

## Community Goals

**During the visioning process**, residents were pressed to share what they value most about the property and how they envisioned Fisher’s Peak Ranch benefiting Trinidad. The following set of goals emerged from these discussions:

1. Ensure the long-term protection of Fisher’s Peak Ranch’s natural resources and beauty.
2. Use careful study and design to meld natural resource protection with public access and recreation.
3. Provide a diversity of ways for Trinidad residents and visitors to experience and enjoy the property and the peak.
4. Utilize Fisher’s Peak Ranch as an outdoor classroom that accommodates environmental education and inspires stewardship.
5. Draw visitors to Trinidad and catalyze local economic development with the thoughtful creation of recreation facilities on Fisher’s Peak Ranch.
6. Protect the Fisher’s Peak viewshed and dark night skies.

# Future Uses

Throughout the community engagement we heard genuine and widespread support for opening Fisher's Peak Ranch to recreation. Many Trinidad residents expressed gratitude for the property's remote and rugged terrain in such close proximity to Trinidad and the amazing opportunity it presents to "get away from it all" and "connect to nature."

Another common theme that emerged during discussions was utilizing Fisher's Peak Ranch to host educational, outdoor recreation and skills programs for youth and adults in order to connect more residents with nature.





**Residents expressed** interest in different levels and types of recreation. Some called for quiet, nature-oriented recreation while others supported motorized uses and/or more intensive recreation development like gondolas and zip-lines. The lists below capture the wide assortment of recreation ideas shared.

### Potential Recreation Uses

- Hiking
- Mountain biking
- Hunting
- Climbing Fisher's Peak
- Camping
- Rock climbing
- Equestrian use
- Picnicking
- Fishing
- OHV use
- Limited vehicular use (to provide access to adjoining SWAs and to ensure accessibility for all)
- Nordic skiing
- Snowshoeing
- Skiing
- Stargazing
- Via ferrata
- Zip Line

### Programming Ideas


- Guided interpretive tours
- Environmental education programs
- Guided hikes up Fisher's Peak
- Mountain bike lessons for youth
- Horseback rides
- Guided jeep tours
- Bee habitat and native plant education
- Native American-led treks
- Wilderness survival classes
- Wildfire education
- Youth employment opportunities (e.g., trail building, restoration)
- Nature-based art programs
- Citizen science programs (e.g., BioBlitz, bird counts)
- Helicopter Tours
- Gondola/chairlift rides

### Other Potential Uses

- Nature photography
- Wildlife viewing
- Drone use
- Remote control craft use
- Herb/plant collection
- Antler collection

# Facilities for Fisher's Peak Ranch

Going “light on the land” was the most commonly expressed approach to the development of facilities on Fisher's Peak Ranch. There was a strong desire to carefully meld natural resource protection with recreation. Still a broad selection of potential recreation and visitor use facilities were suggested.



**Fisher's Peak Ranch “will give this town a heartbeat. We don't have any recreation, because we don't have public land. There is no place to recreate here. This piece of property will change that.”**

*Trinidad resident*

## Potential Recreation and Visitor Facilities

- Campgrounds
- Environmental Education and/or Visitor Center
- Outdoor classroom
- Overnight cabins or yurts
- Field Study Center
- Amphitheater / Music Venue
- Retail outlet that sells food, water, maps, basic outdoor supplies
- Maintain some roads (restore others)
- Re-use hunting cabin on top of McBride
- Healing retreat facilities
- Hostel
- Zip line
- Gondola or Chairlift
- Youth camp facilities
- Interpretive signs
- Rental facilities (e.g., events, weddings, non-profit retreats)
- Water feature (e.g., lake, pond) to allow for more fishing opportunities.
- Equestrian facilities / stables
- Mini solar or wind generation to power facilities




*“It’s a dream to climb to Fisher’s Peak.” Trinidad resident*

# Trail System

**A comprehensive trail system** was the most commonly suggested recreation facility. Residents called for trails to accommodate multiple types of users (e.g., bikers, hikers, equestrians) and expressed a desire for trail connections to adjacent and nearby properties (e.g., SWAs, Sugarite State Park, downtown Trinidad). The following trail system attributes were recommended:

- Multiple trailheads and access points (with parking)
- Trail to the top of Fisher’s Peak.
- Hiking trails. Major, long hiking trails.
- Biking trails
- Extensive trail system that could accommodate competitive events (e.g., trail marathons, bike races)
- Multi-use trails (for equestrians, bikes, hikers)
- Fisher’s Peak Traverse (a long or multi-day hike across the property)
- Downhill mountain bike trail
- Bike park or features
- A very steep, stair-step trail (e.g., Colorado Springs’ Incline)
- Via ferrata trail system (e.g., Canon City)
- Winter trail access - nordic trails and snowshoe routes
- Links to adjoining SWAs
- Trail connection from downtown Trinidad
- Connection to Raton (via Old Raton Pass Road and/or Sugarite State Park)



**“I would like  
to see it remain as  
natural as possible,  
yet still allow good  
clean outdoor activities  
for residents and tourists  
alike.”**

*Trinidad resident*

**“Twenty  
years from  
now, I would like  
to see an abundance of  
wildlife and some form  
of raw nature that hasn’t  
been disturbed yet.”**

*Trinidad city councilman*



# Natural Resource Conservation Sentiments

A common refrain in the visioning dialogue was the importance of protecting the property's natural resources and natural beauty. It was widely acknowledged that Fisher's Peak Ranch is a very special piece of land, that these types of conservation opportunities are unique, and that it is imperative to ensure the long-term protection of habitat, wildlife and the viewshed.

## Conservation sentiments expressed during the visioning project included:

- Protect wildlife
- Keep it natural
- Designate wilderness zones where use is light
- PLEASE act to preserve what we have here
- Study all the natural resources
- Plan for forest, habitat and wildlife management
- Consider grazing
- Maintain a pristine environment
- Avoid light pollution, protect dark night skies
- Ensure its always beautiful to behold

# Anticipated Management Challenges

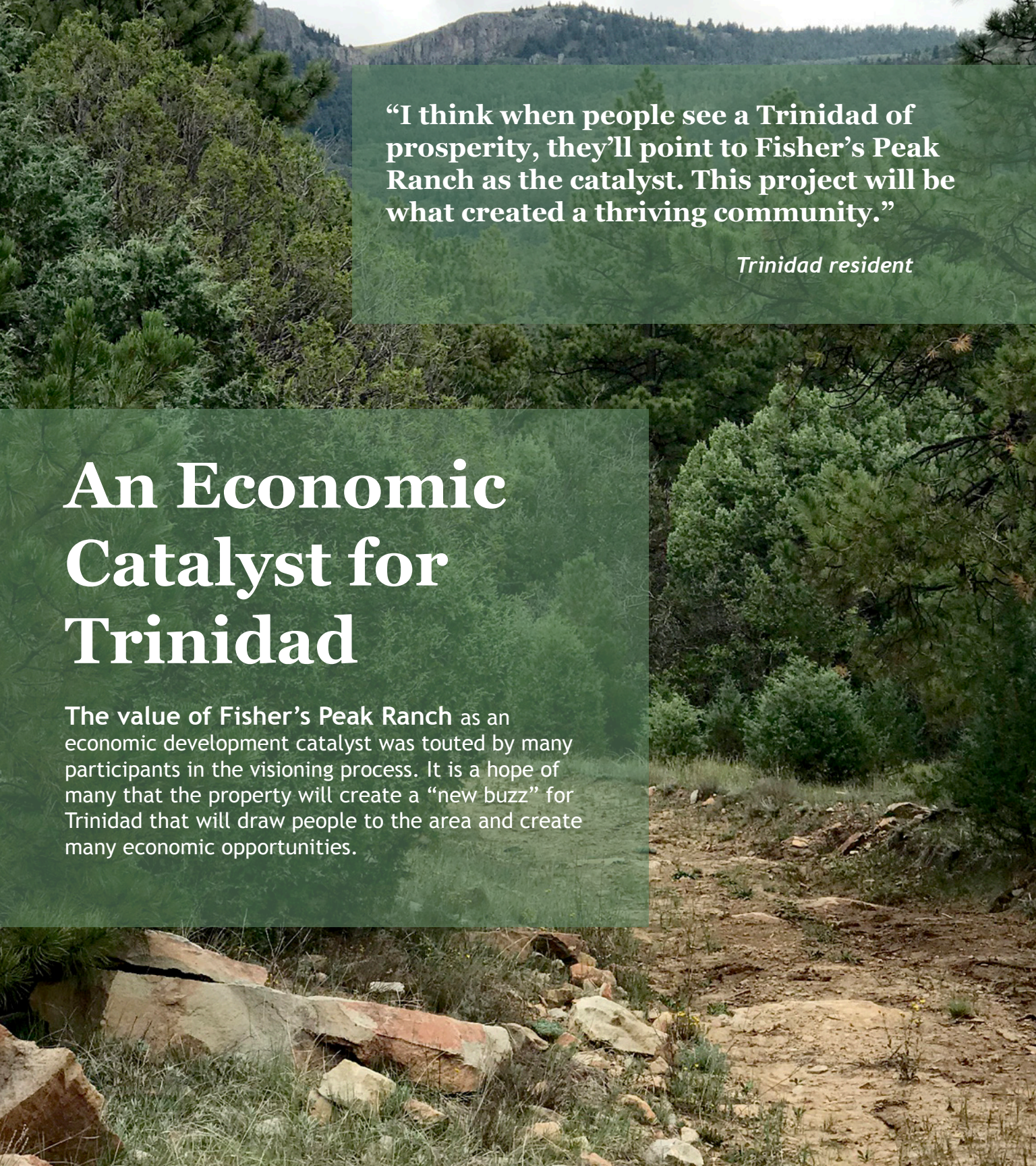
While the focus of the visioning project was on what Fisher's Peak Ranch could become, some questions and concerns were raised with regards to how the property and its visitors will be managed. The management challenges that were identified are listed below and these will be addressed during the upcoming management planning effort.

**“Do it right. Don't rush it.”**

*Trinidad resident*

- **Visitor Access.** Will it be day-use only or will camping be allowed? Will trails be open year-round? Where will access points be located? Will there be an entrance fee? Where will access points/trailheads be located?
- **Balancing Use and Conservation.** Don't want the property overrun nor “loved to death”.
- **Motorized Uses.** Heard varying opinions on whether motorized recreation is an appropriate use or not. Will need to determine the amount (if any) and locations of vehicular and/or OHV uses.

- **Trails.** Will trails be open to multiple uses or segregated by uses (e.g. hiking only, bike trails)? Will dogs be allowed on trails?
- **Hunting.** A range of opinions were expressed about whether hunting is appropriate on the property. Non-hunters expressed concern that hunting would limit their recreation opportunities during the fall. Providing access to hunting opportunities on adjoining SWAs was supported overall.
- **Trespassing.** Concern about trespassing from Fisher's Peak Ranch onto neighboring properties. Will the property be fenced and/or posted?
- **Leave No Trace.** Concern with controlling litter. How can a "leave no trace" ethic be taught, shared and enforced?
- **Safety.** Develop recreation infrastructure with search and rescue protocols in mind. Need messaging to warn of inherent dangers of backcountry travel and ensure visitors are prepared. What safety features and/or warnings are necessary for the Fisher's Peak climb?
- **Fire.** How will fire danger be mitigated? How will wildfires be handled?
- **Transportation.** Concern about traffic and how we move people to the property and around it. Could people park in town (Trinidad or Raton) and be shuttled to the property? The railroad connects La Junta, Raton, Trinidad and Albuquerque, could it be used to bring visitors to Fisher's Peak Ranch?
- **Volunteers.** There is interest among locals in volunteering. Build a volunteer force to help with maintenance, trail patrols, programming, etc.
- **Management Models.** Don't reinvent the wheel, look at what other communities like Fruita, Del Norte and Athens, OH have done to build a recreation/tourism destination.
- **Property's Name.** Fisher's Peak Ranch is already the name of a subdivision in Las Animas County and could prove to be confusing and/or problematic in the future.



“I think when people see a Trinidad of prosperity, they’ll point to Fisher’s Peak Ranch as the catalyst. This project will be what created a thriving community.”

*Trinidad resident*

# An Economic Catalyst for Trinidad

The value of Fisher’s Peak Ranch as an economic development catalyst was touted by many participants in the visioning process. It is a hope of many that the property will create a “new buzz” for Trinidad that will draw people to the area and create many economic opportunities.



## Destination development and entrepreneurial ideas shared include the following:

- ***Issue commercial use permits for local businesses*** to operate on the property (e.g., sell food at the trailhead, run tours, educational programming, guided hikes/rides, environmental education programs).
- ***Invest in mountain biking trails.*** The terrain and beauty and system of roads lends itself to mountain biking trail development and there's the potential to create a world-class mountain biking destination and make Trinidad a destination. We could host mountain bike events, combine Fisher's Peak Ranch with existing trail systems (e.g., Wormhole, Trinidad Lake State Park) to build a weekend's worth of riding for visitors and accommodate bikers year-round.
- ***Encourage investment in Trinidad residents*** interested in creating local business that would support and enhance the tourism experience (e.g., gear shop, restaurant, tour services, shuttles).
- ***Market the property*** in a compelling manner. Tie into its cultural heritage (e.g., Santa Fe Trail).
- ***Position the property as an event venue*** (e.g., mountain bike races, marathons, concerts, festivals) .
- ***Promote Fisher's Peak Ranch*** in combination with the Space to Create designation in order to attract artists and recreationalists looking for a refuge from the Denver Metro area, more affordability and a slower pace of life.





# A Youthful Vision

In Feb 2019, the Visioning Team paid a visit to Fisher's Peak Elementary School to tell the 4th and 5th grade about the Fisher's Peak Ranch project and to collect their input. The students were eager to learn about their new protected and public open space and they were full of ideas for what to do on the land and how to protect it.



Here's a sampling of what the students would like to do for fun on Fisher's Peak Ranch:

- "Ride horses and make bird feeders, go camping and make s'mores"
- "Rock climbing, field trips, horseback rides"
- "Explore and go mountain biking and rock climbing"
- "See animals in real life"
- "Hiking on the trails"
- "See wildlife and get fresh air and see the mountains"
- "Look for arrowheads and ride horses"
- "Explore, ride my bike, hike, climb rocks, look for lizards and other wildlife"



Here's a sampling of what Trinidad's 4th and 5th graders would create on Fisher's Peak Ranch if they had a magic design wand. None of these items appeared on the adults' list of proposed facilities:

- Tree houses
- Fire towers
- Stargazing campground
- Obstacle course
- 1st Aid Station
- Outdoor movie screen
- Mountain top campground
- Tipis
- Animal sanctuary (for hurt animals)
- Observation stations
- Parent and kid zones
- Natural history museum
- Treehouses for kids
- Laser tag
- Bungee jump
- Cabin for girls
- Gardens



Here's what Trinidad's future stewards think is special about Fisher's Peak Ranch:

- "It is colorful and lets the kids be in nature."
- "The beautiful nature"
- "It is a very special landmark to us and other people."
- "It is really pretty and healthy."
- "For years it has been a private place, but finally it will be open to the public."
- "It's pretty and it has wildlife and a ton of breathtaking views. It's truly the best."
- "The nature is what is special."



*March 2019*

**Thanks to all the Trinidad residents who have lent their support and shared their ideas for the future of Fisher's Peak Ranch. We look forward to continuing to work with you as we move into management planning for the property.**

