



NEWS

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Tying the Bow at Cherry Creek State Park

Centennial, Colo. – Late-summer prairie grasses and shimmering cottonwood trees provided the backdrop today for a ceremony to mark the permanent protection by the Trust for Public Land of 28 acres of meadows, wetlands, and stream banks on the south side of Cherry Creek State Park. The property, called the “Bow-tie” due to its distinctive shape, is located at the confluence of Cherry and Piney Creeks at the extreme southeastern corner of the State Park.

Gov. Bill Owens, who is also a resident of the City of Centennial, attended today’s ceremony, which was hosted by TPL, the national non-profit land conservation organization which negotiated the property’s purchase and facilitated the subsequent conveyance of most of it into public ownership.

Gov. Owens said, “This small but important corner of Colorado represents what is possible when the public and private sector work together. Today, we’re taking time not only to mark protection of this place and all that it represents – as a home for wildlife, as a buffer for a state park that is among the most visited in Colorado, as a place where soon we will embark on some innovative water quality management measures, as a lovely backdrop for a walk on a Saturday afternoon. Today, we also are marking what this place says about us as a community of fellow Coloradans, about our capacity to work together when we’ve focused on the commonality of our goals, about the kind of place we want Colorado to be, now and for our children.”

The original 30.5-acre property, which was formerly the site of a commercial greenhouse, has been split into several parcels with 10.5 acres going to the state to be added to Cherry Creek State Park, almost 8 acres going to the City of Centennial for open space, and about 12 acres

going to the private Ranches at Cherry Creek, of which 9.5 will be protected with a conservation easement. The balance has been entitled for the construction of 4 single-family homes.

It is a far different outcome that had been envisioned when the property was put on the market for development two years ago. At that time, it was zoned for high-density residential development and could have supported 270 dwelling units.

Instead, TPL teamed up with several public and private partners to acquire the property as public open space. TPL's partners included Steve Grove, the neighboring private landowner to the south of the property; Colorado State Parks; the City of Centennial; Arapahoe County; the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, Urban Drainage and Flood Control District; and the Orchard Valley Homeowners Association.

Doug Robotham, TPL's Colorado Director, credited the project's success to the diverse funding partnership that financed the deal. "This property might have been intensively developed, which inevitably would have impacted the state park, would have also put pressure on important riparian wildlife habitat, and would have contributed to already diminished water quality in Cherry Creek, Piney Creek and Cherry Creek Reservoir. Instead, the partners came together, leveraged each other's financial resources in creative ways, and helped to secure this property forever as public open space." Robotham cited the involvement of the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority as an example of the creative leveraging he said was a hallmark of the land protection project.

"Our hats are off to the Board and staff of the Basin Authority," said Robotham. "After careful deliberation, they decided that their water quality improvement mission could be well-served by investing in this land protection project and working cooperatively with the other project partners to develop wetlands on a portion of the site. They crunched the numbers and determined that the cost of this solution compared favorably with the costs of other water quality treatment measures they've been studying, in part since their investment leveraged public and private resources that otherwise would not have been available for water quality improvements. To my knowledge, this is the first time that a Colorado water quality agency has concluded that land conservation can be a cost-effective complement to more traditional kinds of water quality control measures."

In 2001, Gov. Owens championed state legislation to expand the Basin Authority board and provide it additional tools to address water quality concerns in Cherry Creek Reservoir and throughout the Cherry Creek Basin. "The Basin Authority's creative initiative on this project is just the kind of mind-set that will allow Colorado to balance continued growth with protection of our environment," said Owens.

"We're engaged in many initiatives with limited resources to protect water quality in the Cherry Creek Basin," said Marie Mackenzie, Authority Vice Chair, who also serves on the Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners. "We thought long and hard before making this \$350,000 investment, but in the end, the merits of the project spoke volumes. Bottom line: we can invest in water quality improvements and at the same help to protect open space."

The Basin Authority's \$350,000 investment was complemented by \$260,000 from the City of Centennial, which also is taking ownership of the eight easternmost acres of the property. The City intends to manage the property in association with Arapahoe Parks and Recreation District in the near term for its open space values. Mayor Randy Pye said, "As Colorado's newest city, Centennial is proud to have played an integral part in this project. The State Park and parks in general are important elements of the quality of life in Centennial, and this project encompasses what is Centennial's very first city park. Centennial's portion will be maintained by the Arapahoe Parks and Recreation District, and the whole property will be preserved to the benefit of Centennial and Colorado residents."

Other public funding partners included Arapahoe County, which contributed \$100,000 to the effort, Colorado State Parks, which contributed \$99,000, and the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, which contributed \$50,000.

"Arapahoe County is pleased to participate in the Bow Tie project because it demonstrates our commitment to preserving open space and our philosophy that governments work best when we all work together to solve regional and local issues," said Commissioner Debra Vickrey, who chairs the Board of County Commissioners. "This project is an excellent example of how regional cooperation can stretch limited tax dollars, preserve open space, protect our environment, improve our water quality and ultimately benefit the citizens of our community."

"Eleven acres will be added to the park through this partnership," added Lyle Laverty, Colorado State Parks Director. "Development on the land will include avenues to educate our visitors on the importance of water quality as well as provide additional recreational access to Cherry Creek. With nearly 1.5 million visitors to Cherry Creek each year, this purchase solidifies our commitment to improving outdoor recreational opportunities for the people of Colorado."

"The Urban Drainage and Flood Control District is pleased to participate in this significant open space acquisition and to have the unique opportunity to leverage our dollars to help purchase this historic property," said Scott Tucker, Executive Director of the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District. "This project is a prime example of how we can protect water quality, preserve floodplain and wetlands, and create additional parklands."

With preliminary commitments of \$850,000 in public funding in hand by the spring of 2002, when TPL's original purchase option was set to expire, TPL and its partners nevertheless found themselves well short of the \$2.1 million required to complete the purchase of the land and two wells from the seller, the Denver Wholesale Florist Company. TPL was able to secure the first of several extensions to its purchase option from the seller, and then went looking for funds to supplement the public money. As it turned out, TPL found that it didn't have far to go when the property owner to the south, Steve Grove, generously stepped forward with a commitment of over \$1.2 million to the effort. Grove will retain about 12 acres and four house sites, while extinguishing development rights on the remainder of the property through a conservation easement.

TPL's Robotham said, "Every land conservation project I've been involved with has its own story – there's usually an impossible quest, a compelling cast of community characters, occasionally a villain, and, invariably, a hero who steps forward to allow everyone whose been working hard toward a positive result to succeed. In this story, Steve Grove is that hero."

The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit organization, conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Since, 1972, TPL has protected more than 1.5 million acres nationwide with a value of more than \$2 billion. TPL depends on the support of individuals, foundations, and businesses to achieve our mission. In Colorado, TPL has protected over 70,000 acres of the state's most treasured parks, open space, farms and ranches and wildlands.