

FROM PAGE A1

'It's all about protecting the special places in Larimer County to keep Larimer County a special place.

— K-Lynn Cameron, Larimer County open lands manager



Reporter-Herald/STEVE STONER

Loveland resident J. Montgomery walks his dog, Sass, on the trail along the Devil's Backbone on the west side of town. Montgomery said he uses the trail several times a week to go for walks and said he thinks open-space areas are a good idea.

Visionary idea

By RACHEL CARTER
REPORTER-HERALD STAFF WRITER

After the airplane took off from Denver International Airport, heading northwest, K-Lynn Cameron looked out the window into the night sky.

She could see the lights of Loveland and the outline of Lake Loveland.

She could see a column of headlights on U.S. 287 leading to the lights of Fort Collins.

But Cameron saw nothing between the two cities — and she loved it.

"West of 287 was just pitch black," said Cameron, Larimer County open lands manager.

"I thought, 'Oh my gosh, we did it.' That was really amazing to me."

The open space buffer between Loveland and Fort Collins city limits was the first project that county and city officials completed using money from the "Help Preserve Open Spaces" tax that began 10 years ago today.

Through the end of September 2005, the 0.25 percent sales tax had accumulated more than \$73 million since it took effect Jan. 1, 1996. County officials expected the tax revenue to total more than \$77 million by the end of 2005.

That money has helped Larimer County protect and preserve more

County open space tax turns 10 today

RI IN THE KNOW

For more information about Larimer County open lands, visit www.larimer.org and click the "Departments" link, then select "Parks and Open Lands."

For more information about the city of Loveland, visit www.cityofloveland.org and click "City Departments," then select "Parks and Recreation."

than 38,500 acres of open space, Cameron said.

"It's all about protecting the special places in Larimer County to keep Larimer County a special place," she said.

Voters passed the open-space tax in November 1995 by a 2-to-1 mar-

RI BY THE NUMBERS

10 — Years since the quarter-cent countywide open space tax took effect Jan. 1, 1996.

\$77 million — Revenue county officials expect to have collected through the end of 2005 from the open space tax in the past 10 years.

\$11.7 million — Portion of revenue Loveland has received from the county open space tax in the past 10 years.

38,500 acres — Acres Larimer County and partnering agencies have protected with open space tax dollars.

4,997 acres — Acres the city of Loveland and partnering agencies have preserved with open space tax dollars.

\$1.50 — Amount of money the county receives from donations, partnerships and grants for every \$1 it spends of open space tax revenue.

25 — Miles of trail the county has on its open lands.

— Rachel Carter

gin: 65.5 percent to 34.5 percent.

The ballot initiative allowed the county to collect a one-quarter-cent sales and use tax — or 1 cent on every \$4 of consumer spending — for eight years to buy open

SEE LAND, PAGE A2

space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails.

At least 55 percent of tax revenue must go to Larimer cities and towns, while the remainder goes to the county.

But, Cameron said, about 58 percent of the money goes to participating cities and towns, which include Loveland, Fort Collins, Berthoud, Johnstown, Windsor, Estes Park, Wellington and Timnath.

During the past decade, the city of Loveland has received about \$11.7 million from the county open space tax, said Brian Hayes, natural areas manager for the city.

The city has used nearly \$6.7 million of that money to protect and preserve natural areas and open space; officials sock away the rest for future purchases and maintenance costs.

All in all, the city has helped preserve nearly 5,000 acres of open space and natural areas.

The city either owns the land, owns a conservation easement or manages or maintains 4,997 acres with partnering agencies, such as the state, county, other cities and land trust agencies.

"There has been a lot of preservation activity in Larimer County, in Loveland, in Fort Collins and in Northern Colorado in general," Hayes said, "which is something that distinguishes us."

"That puts us near the top of the list in preservation efforts in the state and even nationwide."

Hayes said one of the most important purchases was the farmland separator between Loveland and Fort Collins. Longview Wheat Farm had been set to become a residential development with a golf course, Cameron said.

"That's a view thousands of people see every day," Hayes said.

The city of Loveland will continue to preserve natural areas, he said, with its priorities being the land along the Big Thompson River, habitat near Ryan's Gulch in southwest Loveland and the Namaqua ridgeline, the first ridge east of Devil's Backbone.

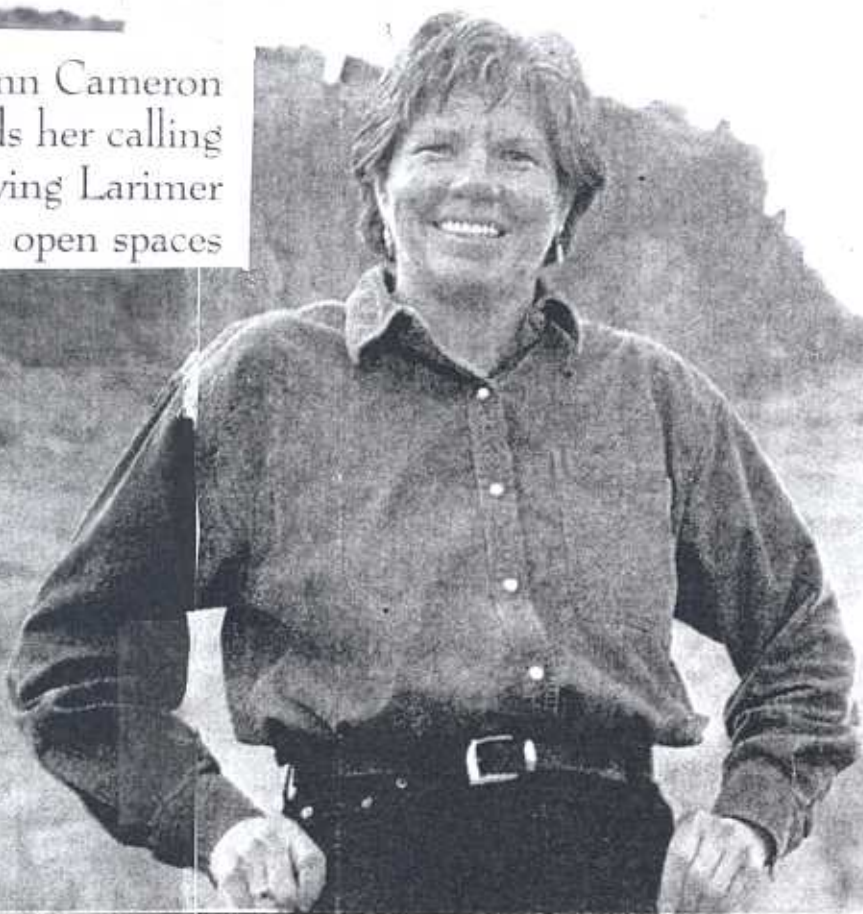
Tax revenue also helped the county fund Devil's Backbone, Chimney Hollow, Eagle's Nest and Fossil Creek Reservoir open spaces, Cameron said, as well as the 54,000-acre Laramie Foothills: Mountains to Plains project, which includes the Red Mountain and Soapstone ranches.

"You really can see the progress we've made in the past 10 years," Cameron said. "I hope people see the progress so they know we're being accountable to the citizens and the money they provide."

For the love of the

land

K-Lynn Cameron finds her calling preserving Larimer County's open spaces



by Bill Snow Jr.

K-Lynn Cameron, Larimer County open lands manager, pauses along the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail during a recent outing with some of the open lands staff.

By Janet Thayer
Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

From the craggy red formations of the Devil's Backbone to the rolling foothills, K-Lynn Cameron has played a part in preserving some of Larimer County's distinctive lands.

Cameron is the Larimer County open lands manager. She is responsible for overseeing the county's open space program — a program designed to preserve and provide open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails.

"My dream has always been to work in an open space program," said Cameron.

The idea of making a living working on natural areas came to Cameron years ago while on a vacation at Redwood National Park in California.

"We were hiking along this trail and it went up and over this fallen redwood," she said. "I remember thinking, wow, somebody laid out this trail. I wish I could do that."

She eventually landed a job in Jefferson County as a trail planner and worked on parks trails. While commuting from her home in Fort Collins, she realized her heart was in Larimer County.

A job opening for an open space coordinator in Larimer County attracted her. And in 1980, she developed a funding strategy for open space, a plan that involved a one-fourth of a cent sales tax.

"That took a long time to come to

fruition, 15 years later," Cameron said.

Voters approved the quarter-cent tax in 1995.

Cameron was part of a citizens group called POST 2001 that worked for the open space sales tax in 1994.

"That was my first adventure in grassroots campaigning. It's an incredible process," she said.

But despite the group's efforts, voters denied the tax increase.

Not to be discouraged, many of the same people, including Cameron, tried to pinpoint what went wrong.

In 1995, the citizens group, Help Preserve Open Spaces, gathered signatures on petitions to again place the tax on the November ballot.

"The first campaign involved a referendum," said Cameron. "Looking back, a petition drive is absolutely critical."

The drive allowed members to talk to people about the issue.

"And as growth occurred that year, more land became unavailable as open space and people saw that," Cameron said about the differences between the ballot items. "And sharing the tax (revenues) with the cities was also another big difference from the first one."

In the meantime, Cameron left the county in 1995 and went to work for the city of Fort Collins.

"At that time, I didn't know if the sales tax would pass and the county was looking at transferring the parks

to the state and I would be out of a job," she said.

While the open space tax failed in 1994, it passed in November 1995. Shortly thereafter, Larimer County hired Cameron to manage its open lands program.

Tom Keith, who worked with Cameron on the campaign committees and serves on the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board, said Cameron's commitment to open spaces is evident.

"K-Lynn is really driven by the goal of open lands protection," Keith said. "She combines her determination with a clear vision of what's important and knowing what types of landscapes the citizens of Larimer County value."

Cameron was at it again last year, helping the Help Preserve Open Spaces committee collect thousands of signatures to extend the tax to 2018 and permit bonding authority. It also passed.

"I basically spent last spring and summer talking to people in grocery stores," she said. "Once I'm there though, I have a good time, because it's something I really believe in."

Her dedication is something Wendell Amos has seen first-hand.

"She is just wonderful to work with," said Amos, of Estes Park, who is a member of the county's Open Lands Advisory Board. "She is very thorough and conscientious and doesn't leave things undone."

Since the tax has been in effect, the county, along with the cities and other organizations, have been able to protect and preserve thousands of acres of riparian areas, land within the corridor, wildlife habitat, farm and ranchlands, as well as construct trails and make improvements to county parks.

"I feel really proud to be a part of preserving the special places of Larimer County," Cameron said. "It really is wonderful," she added and was quick to give credit to the county voters who approved the tax and the landowners who are committed to preserving their property.

She added that she is honored when she hears from people about how much they enjoy certain open areas, such as the Devil's Backbone Nature Trail.

"It's also about knowing when you're driving up highway (U.S.) 34 up to Estes Park and you know there aren't going to be any houses built on this ridge line or this pasture."

But there are frustrations to endure as well. It's hard, Cameron said, when a deal falls apart and the land ends up being developed.

But sometimes a property that seems to be lost for good, instead comes back. While negotiations for the Soderberg Homestead near Horsetooth Mountain Park broke down, the owners eventually resumed talks and the county was able to buy the remaining 103 acres of the ranch.

Meeting with landowners is one of the job's aspects that Cameron enjoys the most.

"These people love their land," she said. "They'll show their land and say, 'this is the most special place in Larimer County.' And I believe them. They're speaking from their hearts and you can just tell how much they care about the land."

The landowners want to preserve their land, but they also must deal with their financial realities, Cameron said.

"It's nice when we can make both those things work and at the same time, be fair to the taxpayers and get as good of a deal as we can."

— Please see page FF-5