

# Clear Spring Ranch

## Resource Management Plan

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URPL 6653 Natural Resources Management  
University of Colorado Denver  
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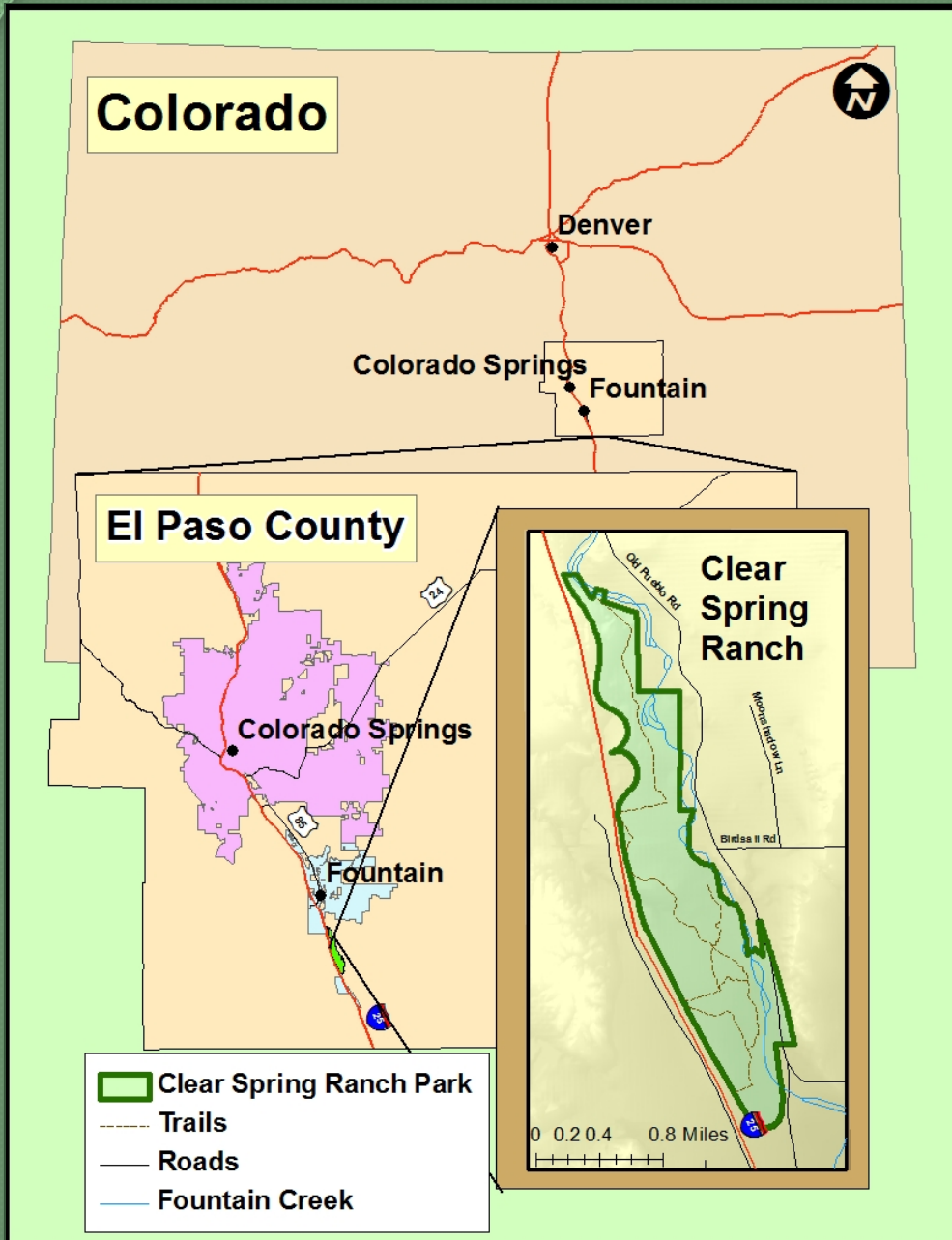
# Purpose of this Assessment

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The primary objective of this planning team was to create a plan which describes the variety of human uses occurring on this property, as well as assess the current ecological condition of the property. Once a cumulative assessment has been accomplished, the negative effect that human uses impose on the ecology of the park will be estimated. The final product of this process will be the creation of a plan that suggests future management options aimed at balancing the human uses with a healthy park ecosystem. This plan is being prepared for the El Paso County Parks and Recreation Department. The plan will be implemented to encourage beneficial human use of this property while holding consistent with El Paso County's master plan and its "efforts to protect some of the county's distinctive landscapes."<sup>1</sup>

# the Site

- Clear Spring Ranch is located about 10 miles south of Colorado Springs in El Paso County.
- The site is adjacent to the eastern side of Interstate 25 and is accessible from Denver by traveling I-25 south and exiting at exit 123.
- The park offers such amenities as: a parking lot, picnic area, ~2 miles of trails, restrooms, and interpretive signs describing the ecology of the park.



# History

- Originally part of Hannah Ranch owned by Kirk Hannah. Hannah Ranch once spread along Fountain Creek south to the City of Pueblo.
  - Kirk Hannah expressed specific intent to preserve the ecological character of the precious Front Range landscape within his ranch.
  - Developments such as the Pikes Peak Raceway and the Ray Nixon Power Plant forced Kirk into an uphill battle.
  - Kirk Hannah committed suicide in 1998, leaving much of his ranch unmanaged.
  - A flood in 1999 destroyed much of the area within Clear Spring Ranch due to lack of property management.
- Colorado Springs Utilities and the Division of Wildlife took control of the portion of Hannah Ranch now known as Clear Spring Ranch.
  - C.S.U. sought to repair flood damage and install some utilities facilities

# History continued

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- In April of 2001, a lease agreement was made between the City of Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs Utilities, and El Paso on the ownership and management of land within Clear Spring Ranch
- A system of trails was built and a section of the park was reserved for the preservation of wetlands ecology. This park became a popular destination for bird watchers.
- Other uses of the park to emerge since the agreement include; agriculture, development of utilities facilities, recreation, and preservation of natural resources.
  - A management plan does not currently exist to balance these uses

# Ownership

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- The lease agreement between C.S.U. and El Paso County was signed on April 23, 2001 by the Chair of the El Paso Board of County Commissioners and the Chief Operating Officer of Colorado Springs Utilities.
  - The agreement grants C.S.U. the authority to use the property primarily for the operation and maintenance of utilities related facilities.
    - Facilities may include; power generation, wastewater treatment, water treatment, and related support facilities
  - El Paso County received the authority and responsibility to manage wildlife and control public access to Clear Spring Ranch.
    - The county's responsibilities include; wildlife management, public access management, facilities and improvements, security, funding, fencing, and signage.

# Management

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•As described by the lease agreement, El Paso County is primarily responsible for managing wildlife and controlling public access to the park. The lease describes the County's responsibility to create an Annual Land Management plan to accomplish these objectives.

- Wildlife Management: The county must implement standard wildlife management strategies and may cooperate with Colorado Springs or the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

- Public Access: This includes providing recreation opportunities, trail maintenance, facilities maintenance, parking, signage, and enforcement of rules/laws.

- El Paso County's property manager of this park, Jim Morgan, addressed some short-comings in the county's management of the property. A lack of resources and personnel prevent the county from being able to properly manage trails and recreation opportunities. There are, at most, three people available to engage in the physical management of the property. Currently, an Annual Land Management Plan does not exist.

# Management continued

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- The city of Colorado Springs and Colorado Springs Utilities were given a separate set of management rights and responsibilities. These are as follows:
  - Right to develop utilities related facilities
  - Development of a noxious weed plan to be included in the County's Annual Land Management Plan
  - Right to lease a portion of the property (including a working farm) to sharecroppers to maintain agricultural uses
  - Development of gates or security to prevent the public from entering forbidden areas
  - The City maintains the rights to the water within Clear Spring Ranch provided it shares enough water with the County to engage in management

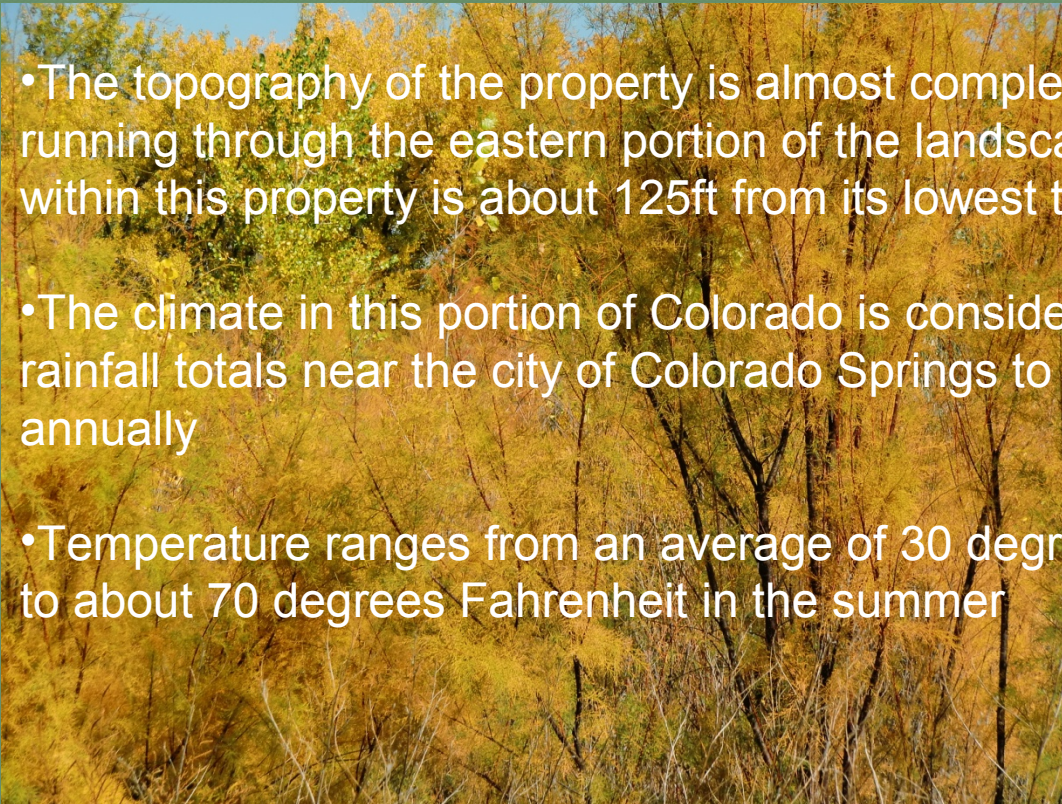
# Environment

Clear Spring Ranch Park is located in the Southwest Plains Piedmont Plains and Tablelands eco-region. This eco-region is characterized by the EPA as a a “vast area of regular and dissected plains underlain by shale and sandstone.”

- The topography of the property is almost completely flat with Fountain Creek running through the eastern portion of the landscape. The range of elevation within this property is about 125ft from its lowest to highest point.

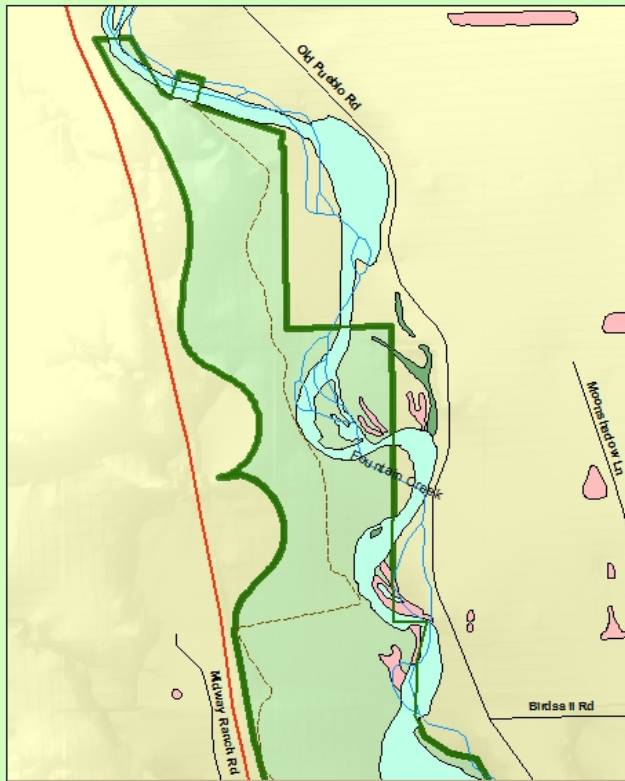
- The climate in this portion of Colorado is considered to be semi-arid with rainfall totals near the city of Colorado Springs to average about 16 inches annually

- Temperature ranges from an average of 30 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter to about 70 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer

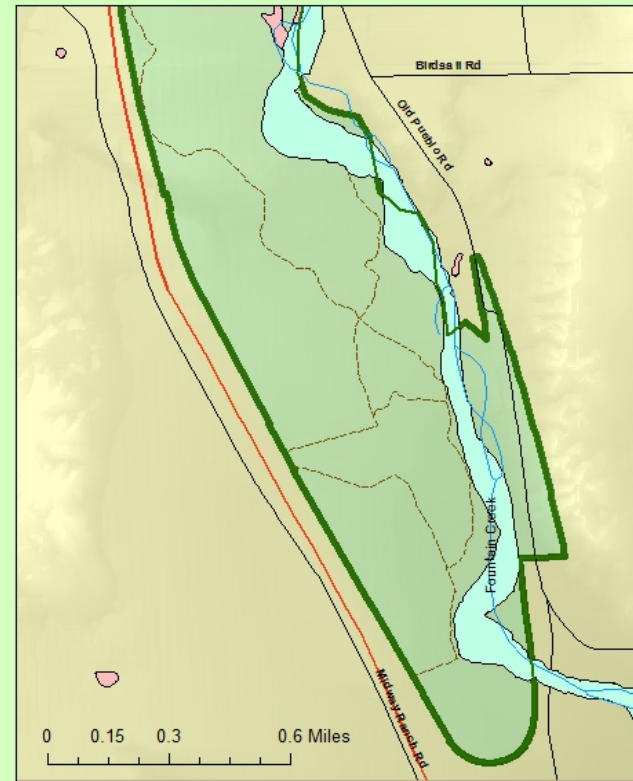


# Environment: Wetlands

## Location and Type of Wetlands



Northern Portion of Property

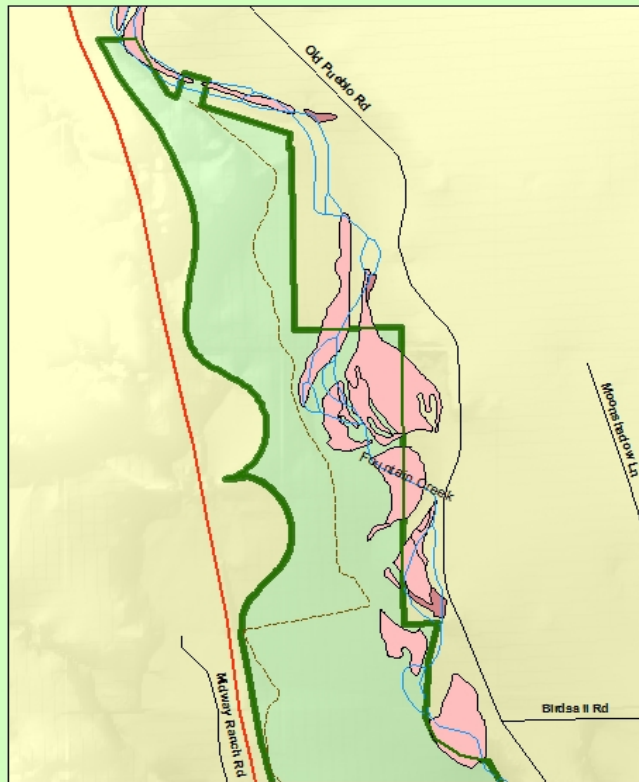


Southern Portion of Property

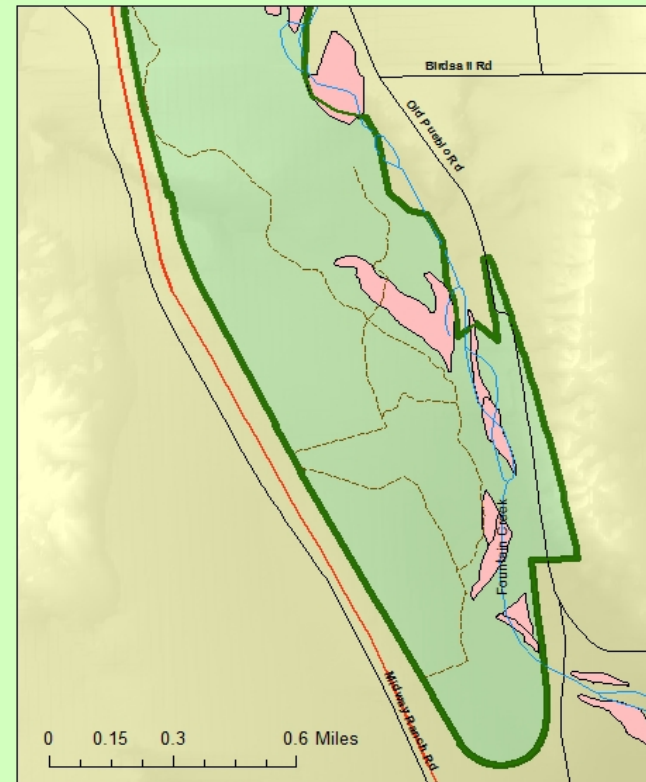
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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Clear Springs Ranch Park Wetlands | Freshwater Emergent Wetland       |
| Fountain Creek                    | Riverine                          |
| Trails                            | Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland |

# Environment: Riparian Habitat

## Location and Type of Riparian Habitat



Northern Portion of Property



Southern Portion of Property

- Clear Springs Ranch Park Riparian Habitat
- Fountain Creek
- Trails
- Forested/Shrub Riparian
- Herbaceous Riparian

# Environment: Wildlife

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- **Flora:** Common vegetation that occurs in this area include many types of grasses and few tree species. . According to the EPA, some common types of vegetation found in this eco-region include; buffalo grass, blue grama, western wheat grass, galleta, alkali sacaton, sand drop seed, sideoats grama, and yucca. The few native tree species located in this area include; Cottonwood and Willows
- **Fauna:** According to the Division of Wildlife, the most common animals that live in this type of habitat include; Coyote, Swift Fox, Black Tailed Prairie Dog, Striped Skunk, White-tailed Deer, and various types of mice including Preble's Jumping Mouse. Bird species vary drastically through the seasons within the riparian habitat. This riparian habitat fosters great diversity in bird species.

# Resource Significance

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- Fountain Creek is a tributary water source that collects the water from the Fountain Creek Watershed and transports it into the Arkansas River near Pueblo.
  - Fountain Creek Watershed Organization- “Flooding and erosion have accelerated the loss of aquatic and wetland habitats, contributed to the loss of hundreds of acres of productive farmland, and caused the foundations of roads and homes to crumble”
  - According to the EPA, wetlands are highly sensitive to environmental changes and provide for the production of riparian habitat. Wetlands also have various other benefits such as; natural water quality improvement, flood storage, shoreline erosion protection, opportunities for recreation and aesthetic appreciation.

# Resource Significance continued

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- **Riparian Habitat<sup>1</sup>**

- In the state of Colorado, riparian habitat is responsible for 82% of avian nesting grounds.
- 51% of avian species completely depend on riparian habitat
- Riparian habitat becomes particularly important during migration when species diversity reaches its peak
- Many government actions have made commitments to preserving wetlands and riparian habitats including; The National Environmental Policy Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, National Forest Management Act, Federal Water Pollution Control Act, and Public Rangelands Improvement Act

<sup>1</sup> Knopf et. Al 1998



# Uses

- Given the unique lease agreement between C.S.U and El Paso County, this property must sustain a very wide range of uses. These uses include;
  - Agriculture
    - Sharecropping on western portion of property
  - Development and maintenance of utilities
    - Water intake facilities, power generation, waste water treatment
  - Recreation
    - Hiking, Biking, Picnicking, and Wildlife viewing (particularly bird watching)

# Uses continued

## Recreation

- According to the property manager, Jim Morgan, recreation at this park is highly under utilized.
- Trails have been under maintained due to lack of resources
- One special interest of this property is bird watching and this use is celebrated by several avian clubs such as;

☾ Colorado Birding Trail

☾ Colorado County Birding

☾ Colorado Birding Society



### CLEAR SPRING RANCH TRAIL

**Wildlife Species at Clear Spring Ranch**

Clear Spring Ranch is home to many wildlife species which visitors can observe in natural habitats.

- Black-tailed Prairie Dog\*
- Coyote\*
- Mule Deer\*
- Red Fox\*
- White-tailed Deer\*
- Wild Turkey\*

Bird watchers are likely to see a variety of songbirds and raptors.

- Black-capped Chickadee\*
- Great Horned Owl\*
- House Wren
- Red-tailed Hawk\*

Clear Spring Ranch is even home to a few rare species.

- Blue Grosbeak\*
- Warbling Vireo
- White-tailed Sparrow.
- Yellow-breasted Chat

*\*These species also breed at Clear Spring Ranch.*

#### Habitat at Clear Spring Ranch

Clear Spring Ranch's varied habitat attracts many wildlife species for a variety of reasons. First, its location is near the interface of the grasslands and foothills ecosystems. Second, the property contains riparian habitat along Fountain Creek, as well as wooded areas and open fields. This diverse habitat makes Clear Spring Ranch extremely valuable to many wildlife species.

Colorado Springs Utilities is committed to environmental stewardship and enhancing the quality of life for our citizen-owners.

Colorado Springs Utilities  
El Paso County Parks

# Threats/ Stresses

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- As described by the property manager, the biggest threats to the ecology of Clear Spring Ranch park include Invasive Species, Lack of resources for management, and flooding/erosion as a result of the lack of management.
  - **Invasive Species:** without the resources to spray weeds and remove invasive species, they pose a significant threat to riparian habitat
  - **Recreation Management:** Trails and facilities are a part of the recreation experience. If trails can not be sufficiently maintained, visits to the site are lost and it fails to maintain its aesthetic and social values
  - **Flooding and Erosion:** Despite the installation of a flood pump in 1999, the property is still susceptible to harmful floods due to the loss of wetlands upstream from the property

# Proposed Management

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Management strategies in response to threats may include the following;

- Increased public awareness of the underutilized park may result in more interest in the upkeep of trails and facilities. Popularity may attract volunteer organizations.
- Enforcement of provisions of the lease agreement requiring Colorado Springs to develop and implement an invasive species plan. Limited County resources prevent it from controlling invasive species. However, it is the duty of the city of Colorado Springs to accomplish this task

# Proposed Management

- Management strategies in response to threats may include the following;
  - Due to lack of management resources, El Paso County may benefit from Federal Grant programs; such as the Federal Trails Grant program offered by the Federal Highway Administration.
- The park may be eligible for such grants as it displays popularity to bird watching associations., while demonstrating its current lack of funding



# Conclusion

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- Overall, the wetlands and riparian habitat that exists on Clear Spring Ranch represent precious resources. By continuing to preserve these areas, the vision of this property's original owner, Kirk Hannah, can be sustained.
- The variety of uses that occur on this property make this a unique working landscape that represent a large county's need for development and utilities, recreation, and also its desire to preserve the ecological systems that have been determined to be crucial to the survival of a wide variety of flora and fauna.
- It would seem as though increasing awareness of this park can lead to increased opportunities for management through grant programs and volunteer organizations.

# Sources

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始 Colorado Division of Wildlife  
[www.wildlife.state.co.us](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us)

始 El Paso County Parks and Recreation [adm.elpasoco.com/Parks](http://adm.elpasoco.com/Parks)

始 Knopf, F.L. et Al. (1988) Conservation of Riparian Ecosystems in the United States. *The Wilson Bulletin* Vol 100 No. 2

始 The Hanna Ranch Documentary Project [www.hannahranchmovie.com](http://www.hannahranchmovie.com)

始 United States Environmental Protection Agency [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)