

Hermit Park, Red Mountain Open Space areas will reopen Friday

Reporter-Herald Staff

Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Wed Feb 27 20:52:25 MST 2019

Hermit Park Open Space, two miles southeast of Estes Park, will have a limited reopening Friday, March 1, weather dependent, at the end of its annual winter closure.

According to a press release, portions of the campgrounds and cabin loop will open for the season.

The road through Hermit Park Open Space will be open to vehicles up to the new Kruger Rock Trailhead. Visitors can access the Moose Meadow Trail via foot, bike or horse.

Access to trails and the open space itself is weather dependent, the release said. Roads and trails could be closed due if muddy or other adverse conditions arise.

Red Mountain Open Space, located north of Fort Collins, also will reopen Friday.

Before heading to Hermit Park, check current conditions by calling 619-4570 or visiting larimer.org/naturalresources or NoCoTrailReport.org.

For camping information and reservations, call 800-397-7795 or visit larimercamping.com.

Hermit Park opens in its entirety May 1.

Both areas close each year in December through February due to winter weather conditions and to protect winter range habitat for big game animals.

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More Northern Colorado trails temporarily closed Monday

Reporter-Herald Staff

Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted: Mon Mar 11 15:19:56 MDT 2019

FORT COLLINS — According to [NoCo Trail Report](#), trails at the Devil's Backbone leading north to Fort Collins remained closed due to muddy conditions Monday afternoon.

The city of Fort Collins also closed most of Foothills Trail just east of Horsetooth Reservoir.

The closure encompasses Blue Sky Trail, Laughin' Horse Loop, Indian Summer Trail and both foot and bike trails near the Devil's Backbone.

Trails at Bobcat Ridge Natural Area remain open, but with the warning that users would encounter muddy conditions. NoCo Trails says hikers and bikers should avoid widening or damaging trails in muddy sections.

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Flood project aims to improve habitat at River Bluffs Open Space

By Pamela Johnson

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer
Loveland Reporter-Herald

Posted:Wed Mar 13 14:47:23 MDT 2019

Wildlife must have received early word about \$1.67 million in Poudre River and habitat improvements underway at River Bluffs Open Space near Windsor.

"We haven't seen beaver activity in a long time, but just upstream of our project, a beaver has begun building a dam," resource specialist Zac Wiebe said, joking, "They must have gotten our press release."

Joking aside, this project tied to the 2013 flood is aimed at boosting conservation and wildlife habitat on a section of the open space that is not currently open to the public. On the south side of River Bluffs, away from the section of the Poudre River, and near its agricultural fields, crews are improving fish and aquatic habitat, creating wetlands and building side channels to reconnect the river to its flood plain.

"(There are) new overflow channels designed to distribute water in higher flow events, along with large woody structures and artificial beaver dams designed to mimic and promote natural and more resilient river functions," Wiebe wrote in an email.

And, on a side note, he mentioned the return of beaver activity on that stretch of road during a project that will continue over the next several months.

The work is funded with a \$1.3 million federal disaster grant tied to the 2013 flood, as well as \$154,000 from Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Wetlands for Wildlife program and \$100,000 from a habitat improvement grant from Great Outdoors Colorado. The rest of the cost will come from the Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

Most of the funding is a disaster grant tied to the flood, but it is not to address damage that occurred during the flood. Instead, this is for a project aimed at shoring up the banks, improving the habitat and providing space — set channels — for the water to disperse and to diffuse the power and damage of a future flood.

This section of the river was "channelized" in the 1950s to accommodate the Colo. 392 bridge, creating an unnatural condition, Wiebe said in an email, describing that "a straightened river with steep berms basically created a ditch rather than a functioning river."

Instead of moving the river back to its natural path, indicated by a row of cottonwoods several feet from the river's current path, the project will improve the conditions with the surrounding overflow stream channels, by creating wetlands and improved habitat and by planting native vegetation.

River Bluffs balances recreation, conservation and agricultural uses on different sections of the same property.

"This is going to boost that wildlife conservation piece," added Teddy Parker-Renga, communications specialist with the department.

"The real intent of our department was to put this into a more balanced ecosystem in how it responds to floods and affects the habitat."

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