Executive Summary

Plan Scope

The City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation and the Denver Mountain Parks system initiated a Park and Trail Improvement Plan for Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks to assess and identify improvement options with a renewed vision and revitalized priorities. This Plan is intended as a 10-year planning document and begins by recognizing the Park’s significant history, cultural and natural resources, and recreational opportunities. But moving from the past and into the future, the Plan identifies the tremendous potential to enhance the prominence of these Denver Mountain Park system properties while increasing the public’s recreation value. It also discusses the Park’s sustainability of current financial conditions and presents revenue recommendations with funding sources.

In 2013, the Mountain Parks system will celebrate its 100th anniversary, and Genesee Mountain Park was the System’s first acquired Park. With this historic occasion coinciding with the Colorado Department of Transportation’s (CDOT) proposed I-70 paved multi-use trail, it was fitting and timely to begin a comprehensive Park and Trail Improvement Plan for the Park.

Park History

The Denver Mountain Park System, constructed between 1912 and 1941, is a nationally significant series of interconnected foothill and Mountain Parks planned by the celebrated landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. His goal was to connect Denver’s park lands and help people access the natural landscapes both within and from urban areas. The Denver Park Commission purchased Genesee Mountain Park in 1912 and formally opened it in 1913. In 1935, Katherine L. Craig deeded 26 acres of adjoining land to the City and County of Denver to be a part of its Mountain Parks system, with another 18 acres added in 2007.

Plan Methods and Objectives

This planning effort utilized a number of public involvement techniques and tools. These methods included both technology-based communication methods, and hands-on meetings and workshops among advisory groups, the media, the general public, and the project team. There were three public open-house events at three key project stages. At all public and advisory group meetings a series of informational exhibits and graphics were used to convey key messages and solicit comments, both verbally and in written form. Upon completion of the natural resource, facility, and use assessments, the team identified the significant resources found on the Park properties that possess significant cultural, natural, or recreational value. The project team then developed final concept program alternatives of potential proposed development features (trails, parking, architecture, etc.). These programs were prioritized and organized to assist in the formation of development options that include finance recommendations for capital improvements, operations and maintenance.

Plan Findings and Recommendations

Based on the analyses of existing and future conditions of the Park, Action Alternatives for three Zones (Front County, Mid-Country, and Back-Country) were developed along with a conceptual site plan for each alternative. It is important to note that a Trail and Travel Management Plan is an important component of the findings and recommendations.

The Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks continue to be an integral part of the Denver Mountain Parks system. In order to enhance the visitor experience, increase safety, and expand the visitor’s knowledge while creating a memorable sense of place, the Mountain Parks system intends to continue providing a variety of activities and facilities so the visitor will stay longer and return more often to experience all that the Park has to offer.
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Genesee and Katherine L. Craig
Mountain Parks
The Denver Park Commission’s formal opening of the Mountain Parks system on August 27, 1913, included a visit to Genesee Mountain Park, where “an unobstructed view of mountain and plain” was had by all after a ¾ hour hike to the top of Genesee Mountain. This outing was a sweet moment because it had been the campaign to ‘save Genesee Mountain’ that catalyzed the first acquisitions for the Mountain Park system. In 1912, the Denver Park Commission began efforts to purchase most of the current Genesee Mountain Park as its first Mountain Park. In collaboration with a group of Denver businessmen, the Commission saved the pine forest from becoming a lumber source for local sawmills.

At 2,413 acres, Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Park is the largest Mountain Park in the Denver Mountain Parks system, and it also offers the greatest diversity of experiences in the system. Families can hold a reunion and picnic at the large Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) historic shelter and picnic area near the summit. Visitors can bike- or tent-camp overnight at Chief Hosa Campground. Kids can camp overnight in tents for the first time in their lives and take home a new sleeping bag through the Wonderful Outdoor World (WOW) program. Hikers can forget the nearby city and hike the rugged, historic Beaver Brook Trail. At Chief Hosa Lodge, visitors can experience a major life event such as a wedding or Bar Mitzvah. Travelers can stop and watch the bison herd along Interstate Highway 70 (I-70), or venture to the top of Genesee Mountain where the panoramic view connecting mountain and plains is spectacular. Today, the bison herd of about 25 head is a well-known and highly appreciated landmark along I-70. Genesee Mountain Park provides a valuable resource for the residents of the City and County of Denver as well as being a regional and tourist destination.

Currently, Genesee Mountain Park is a relatively unknown recreation gem close to the Denver metropolitan area. The properties contain important resources such as a bison herd descended from Yellowstone bison, a Historic lodge built by the CCC in the 1930s, the first nature trail in Colorado, a trail for visually impaired hikers, healthy old growth Ponderosa pine forest, and a campground and ropes/challenge course, both owned and managed by the City and County of Denver. However, the properties are relatively unknown to most Denver-area residents despite their location on I-70 and the great diversity of recreation experiences that the properties offer. There is tremendous potential to enhance the prominence of the properties within the Denver Mountain Parks system while also increasing the recreation value of the properties for the public.

The Park contains a legacy of built historic facilities dating back to as early as 1860, with the Patrick House and other facilities dating back to 1918, in addition to constructed trails, informal parking areas, social trails, and two historic CCC camps. Although there are many facilities onsite, there is seemingly no coherent vision for how all of the recreation facilities and activities fit together at the site.

The City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation decided additional direction was needed regarding endpoint destinations, vehicular circulation, recreation activities, settings and experiences, access points, and linkages between facilities and destinations. The site does not lack for potential recreation destinations and experiences. However, it needs additional direction and structure to reach its full potential such as adding site connector trails, providing appropriate trail locations and removing inappropriately sited social trails, providing additional hiking trails and picnicking facilities, and developing a formal bison overlook site.

With the proposed I-70 trail and the completion of the Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan the City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation decided it was time to develop a formal plan for the Park that would capitalize on key recreation values. The City wants to provide desired facilities and needed linkages both within the Park and to regional trails, while protecting the important natural and cultural resources on the properties. The plan became reality and is now the Park and Trail Improvement Plan document. It will provide the direction needed to elevate the Park to its highest potential as a recreation destination, while incorporating a sustainable business strategy and ensuring significant resources are protected.

Existing facilities in the Park include fire and charcoal grills, picnic areas, bison enclosures (elk were removed in 2010), scenic overlook, informal softball field, volleyball, horseshoes, camping at Chief Hosa Campground, Braille and Beaver Brook trailhead, a historic day-use shelter, and Genesee Experiential Outdoor Center. The “Braille Trail,” with interpretive signs in braille and waist-high guide wire, was designed for visually impaired hikers.

Genesee Mountain Park Facts:
- Denver’s first Mountain Park was acquired in 1912, 1937, and 2007.
- Largest of Denver’s Mountain Parks at 2,413 acres.
- Scenic gateway to the Rocky Mountains, with views of the Continental Divide.
- First buffalo and elk herds reestablished in Colorado in 1914.
- Katherine L. Craig Mountain Park added (56 acres) in 1935, with another 18 acres in 2007.
The Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan set the Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks apart from the many other Mountain Parks, due to its size, its close proximity to Denver, its direct access from I-70, and its visual quality with dramatic views of the Continental Divide from the I-70 corridor and from the Park. The Master Plan gives the Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks a strong prominence within the Mountain Park system stating, “Because of its potential, Genesee Park warrants intensive program and site planning;” and “Genesee Park is ready for vision. The setting is in need of a facelift to improve its prominence and public role.” In 2011, the City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation applied for and received a GOCO Planning Grant to fund a Park and Trail Implementation Plan for Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks. The result of this planning grant is the Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks, Park and Trail Improvement Plan.

c. Planning Process

This planning document is intended to be a 10-year-long vision for the Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks, which outlines a renewed vision and prioritized set of projects:

- Protect natural resources;
- Enhance recreation use and experiences;
- Create a center for youth education and outreach;
- Create Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks as a destination; and
- Contribute to the financial sustainability of the Denver Mountain Parks system.

Throughout this process there were many opportunities for stakeholders and the public to assist in the development of alternatives for the Park, and to provide direction for its future uses and development of the properties. The intent is to create a high-quality Park and Trail Improvement Plan.

This Park and Trail Improvement Plan balances recreation and conservation. It involved meaningful and structured advisory group, city staff, and public engagement to help determine the potential futures for the Park and the existing structures on site. It proposes safe, accessible, maintainable and sustainable facilities. The Plan also addresses long-term management of important recreation and natural resources.

### Amenities:

- Historic 8.66-mile Beaver Brook Trail
- Chief Hosa Lodge and Campground
- Braille Nature Trail; Stapleton Drive
- Youth Programs; Genesee Experiential Outdoor Center
- Buffalo overlook along I-70
- Historic shelter at Genesee Mountain
- Flagpole and scenic overlook

Genesee Park was an early focal point in the Denver Mountain Parks system acquisition. Before the Mountain Parks Commission (MPC) was fully organized, private companies planned to log areas of old-growth Ponderosa pine. Advocates of the new Mountain Park system rushed to acquire these lands and held them until the MPC was ready to purchase them. Genesee was the first Park in the system, and remains the largest, with new acreage added in 1937 and also in 2007.

In 2013, the Mountain Parks system will celebrate its 100th anniversary. With Genesee being the first acquired Park in the system and with the proposed I-70 trail, it is fitting that the City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation release a Park and Trail Improvement Plan for Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks on this historic occasion.

### b. Parks Planning Process

Early in the twentieth century Denver Mayor Robert Speer, working with a forward thinking community group, developed a vision for “City Beautiful Denver.” A direct result of that long-term vision was the development of an expansive chain of mountain parks in the foothills and mountains outside of Denver. The linked group of parks and scenic drives would serve as a mountain retreat for the people of Denver, eventually becoming the Denver Mountain Parks system, which was formally developed in 1913. There was some general parks planning during the 1900’s, following the development of Mayor Speer’s “City Beautiful Denver”, but no concise planning was completed for the Denver Mountain Parks system.

In 2003, the Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) developed and published a 50-year strategy for its Parks and Recreation system titled the 2003 DPR Game Plan. The bulk of the 2003 DPR Game Plan focused on Parks and Recreation facilities within Denver, while only a small section the report discussed the Mountain Park system. However, one significant recommendation for future studies was to, “Complete master site and management plans for all major mountain sites.”

The 2003 DPR Game Plan recommended the City and County of Denver Parks and Recreation Department launch a 16-month master planning process for its historic 14,141-acre Mountain Park system. The master planning process would be funded with assistance from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). The study began in January 2007, and it was completed and published in 2008, as the Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan. This comprehensive master planning effort looked at the entire 14,141-acre Denver Mountain Parks system, setting long-term needs, goals, challenges, opportunities and recommendations for the entire system, and for each of the 16 individual parks and 24 conservation/wilderness areas including the Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks. The Master Plan outlined what it termed an “urgent call to restore, repair, and protect the deteriorating Park facilities and natural resources” of the Mountain Park system, while also recognizing the “tremendous potential for future enhancements and new programs to draw more families from the City into the mountains and to connect kids to nature.” Nowhere is this potential greater than at the largest Park in Denver’s Mountain Parks system – Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks. Yet, a formal plan for the Park was never completed.

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**d. Vision and Goals**

**IMMEDIATE ACTION:** Change “Genesee Park” to “Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks”.

**GOAL 1. GENESSEE AND KATHERINE L. CRAIG MOUNTAIN PARKS AS A DENVER OUTDOOR RECREATION DESTINATION**

- Develop Genesee and Katherine L. Craig Mountain Parks (the Park) to be an integral part of the Denver Mountain Parks system.
- Create multiple viewing and interpretive overlooks within the Park, offering year round bison viewing and interpretive opportunities. Develop the overlooks to enhance the visitor experience, increase safety, and expand the visitor’s knowledge while creating a memorable sense of place.
- Orient users so they can experience all that the Park has to offer.
- Present the activities of the Park as a ‘package’. Make users want to come for multiple activities and to spend more time in the Park.
- Partner with other regional attractions and agencies to expand the Denver Mountain Parks experience for the City and County of Denver residents.
- Upgrade the Park facilities and infrastructure to accommodate existing and proposed development, including: campgrounds, utilities, roads, restrooms, parking, trails, trailheads, and disabled (ADA) accessibility.
- Expand the Park trails network by developing a consolidated interlinked network of hiking trails.
- Provide a hierarchy of trails types to provide trails experiences for a full range of users including youths, groups, families and the disabled.
- Provide trail connections to adjacent County and State trails network.
- Develop the Park for year round activities.
- Establish strategically located hiking trailheads to support the Parks trail system.

**GOAL 2. GENESSEE AND KATHERINE L. CRAIG MOUNTAIN PARKS AS A CENTER FOR YOUTH EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

- Develop and manage the Park as Denver Mountain Parks system’s epicenter for youth education, interpretation and outdoor mountain activities and programs. Develop Park facilities and programs with a focus on youth outdoor mountain activities, education and interpretation.
- Provide facilities and programs to introduce and educate youth groups to the environmental and historic setting of the Denver Mountain Parks system.
- Provide facilities, programs, events and in-depth opportunities for youths such as overnight camps, day camps, educational programs, guided mountain activities, etc.
- Partner with Denver Public Schools and other City and County youth agencies in the development of youth outdoor education and number of programs.
- Partner with Jefferson County to coordinate with other on-going organized youth programs.

**GOAL 3. GENESSEE AND KATHERINE L. CRAIG MOUNTAIN PARKS AS A CENTER FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION**

- Develop the Park as the center for outdoor education and interpretation for all of the Denver Mountain Parks system.
- Provide a wide range of interpretive and educational facilities and programs to introduce resident groups to the environmental and historic setting of the Park and the Denver Mountain Parks system.
- Develop expanded education, interpretative and research program and associated facilities with the bison as a major theme.
- Provide events/educational opportunities for groups of all ages such as overnight camps, day camps, educational, challenge, and adventure programs.

**GOAL 4. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

- Develop a Management Zone overlay for the Park, creating frontcounty, midcounty, backcountry, and conservation zones. (see Section 5 b for management zone descriptions and locations)
- Use environmental and resource stewardship as a guide for development programming and Park management.
- Enhance storm water management to improve runoff quality and protect the Park’s resources.

**GOAL 5. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

- Develop Park facilities, management and operations to strive for financial sustainability.
- Focus Capital Investment in proposed use areas.
- Develop a signature special event (s) located in the Park.
- Develop special event venues and programs throughout the Park:
  - Create an Arts Venue for exhibits/shows (sculpture gardens, artist in residence program, etc.)
  - Develop enhanced outdoor wedding or special events venues.