

Your Visit

Heil Valley Ranch, comprising 5,020 acres, is part of the North Foothills Open Space which also includes Hall Ranch and additional conservation easements adjacent to the two ranches. The relatively undeveloped nature of Heil Valley has been maintained from its use by prehistoric people through homesteading and its modern day use by ranchers and farmers.

The variety of ecosystems—grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, forests and canyons—support an abundance of wildlife unparalleled in Boulder County.

This area preserves critical wildlife habitats, as well as significant natural communities including wetlands and riparian areas.

There are many ways to spend time at Heil Valley Ranch:

Picnicking: There is a group picnic shelter and shaded picnic area at the southern trailhead.

Hiking: Five trails are available for hiking. The 1.3-mile Lichen Loop trail is for pedestrians only and has a series of interpretive signs.

The 2.5-mile Wapiti, 2.6-mile Ponderosa Loop, 2.9-mile Wild Turkey and 5.2-mile Picture Rock trails are multiple-use.

Mountain biking and equestrians: All trails are open to mountain bikes and equestrians except the Lichen Loop trail, which is for pedestrians only.

Dogs: Dogs are not permitted at Heil Valley Ranch for wildlife habitat protection purposes.

Wildlife

The western part of this property is closed to visitors, allowing wildlife that need large ranges to move naturally within them.

This area is home to over 50 species of mammals — that represents 70 percent of all the



Elk graze in a meadow near the Ponderosa Loop Trail.

mammals found in Boulder County. Among these animals are Abert's squirrels, cottontail rabbits, prairie dogs, marmots, red and gray foxes, mule deer, bobcats, black bears and mountain lions.

Close to 100 birds were observed during a one-season survey. Mountain chickadee, chipping sparrow and yellow-rumped warbler are common in the ponderosa pine forests. Shrublands are dominated by rufous-sided and green-tailed towhees and you can see vesper and lark sparrows in the meadows.

The cliffs and canyons on Heil Valley Ranch are good places for golden eagles and prairie falcons to nest. They can spy down on their prey while remaining safe. Colonies of white-throated swifts, cliff swallows, violet-green swallows and rock doves also call these cliffs home.

Rising above the shrublands, woodlands cover much of the western part of the property. Abert's squirrels depend on the ponderosa pine for survival. Northern goshawk and Cooper's hawk hunt prey here, sometimes catching it

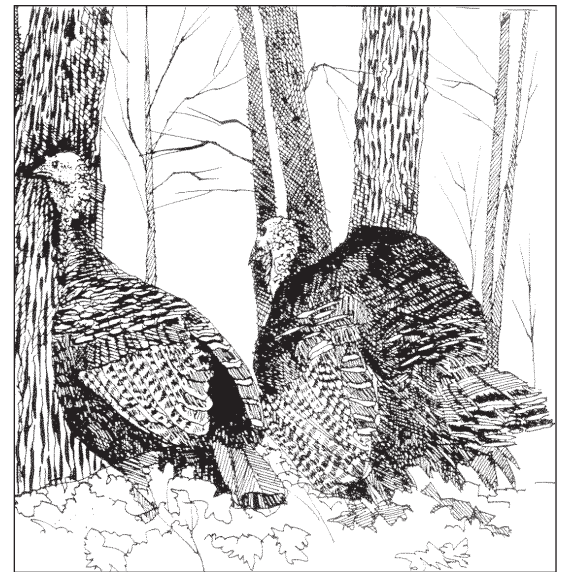
in mid-air. Many cavity nesting birds such as woodpeckers and nuthatches are here.

Heil Valley Ranch is an important winter range for the only herd of elk along the Front Range that journeys from the Continental Divide to the Great Plains!

There is a good chance you'll see wild turkey during your visit—they are well established here.

At the turn of the 20th century, elk were eliminated from Boulder County, but reintroduced between 1913 and 1917. Today, Heil Valley Ranch is an important winter range for elk. Elk feed on grasses, aspen bark, sedges, conifer needles and some aquatic plants. You can see dark marks on tree trunks showing you how far up the elk can reach.

Elk calves are born around the end of May and beginning of June. If you encounter a mother and her baby, it's best to move away and give them space. Adult mothers can defend their babies aggressively.



Geology

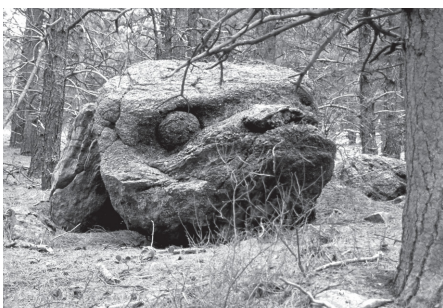
The geology of this area, where the Great Plains meets the Southern Rocky Mountains, is dramatic and complex. This landscape was carved by millions of years of erosion, following periods of uplift that began about 65 million years ago.

The eastern-most ridge, or hogback, at Heil Valley Ranch is capped by the Dakota Formation. This resistant rock is composed of fine sands and coarse gravels. It was transported by rivers and deposited along the shore of a shallow inland sea about 130 million years ago.

On the west side of this property is another series of ridges that look reddish from a distance. These are older rocks, comprised of sediments eroded from the Ancestral Rocky Mountains, which uplifted west of here about 300 million years ago.

The Lyons Formation was deposited as huge wind-blown sand dunes along the flanks of these ancient mountains. This fine-grained sandstone, named after the town of Lyons, has been quarried locally and used for building throughout Boulder County. Many buildings on the University of Colorado's Boulder campus are built from this beautiful and weather resistant stone.

Look around and imagine how this landscape has changed over geologic time. From dynamic mountain-building and inland seas, to millions of years of persistent weathering and erosion, time has left its mark on Heil Valley Ranch.



This rock can be seen from the Lichen Loop Trail.

Rules & Regulations

- No dogs are permitted at Heil Valley Ranch.
- Mountain biking is permitted on officially designated trails only.
- Collecting, removing, destroying or defacing any natural or man-made objects is not permitted.
- Installing rock bolts and constructing trails or structures is unlawful.
- Feeding, disturbing, trapping, hunting or killing wildlife is not permitted.
- Building ground fires is not permitted (fine \$300).
- Discharging or carrying firearms, crossbows, fireworks or projectile weapons of any kind is not permitted (fine \$300).
- No unauthorized motorized vehicles permitted beyond parking lot.
- It is unlawful to carry or possess any glass bottle or container outside an enclosed vehicle.
- State law prohibits the possession or consumption of any beverage having an alcohol content greater than 3.2% in any public place.
- Group reservations are required for any groups larger than 25 people.
- No public access in any closed area.
- No posting of advertisements in park or on vehicles is permitted.
- Property is open from sunrise to sunset—no camping. Vehicles in parks after sunset will be ticketed or towed.

Boulder County Parks & Open Space Department
5201 St. Vrain Road
Longmont, CO 80503
303-678-6200
www.BoulderCountyOpenSpace.org

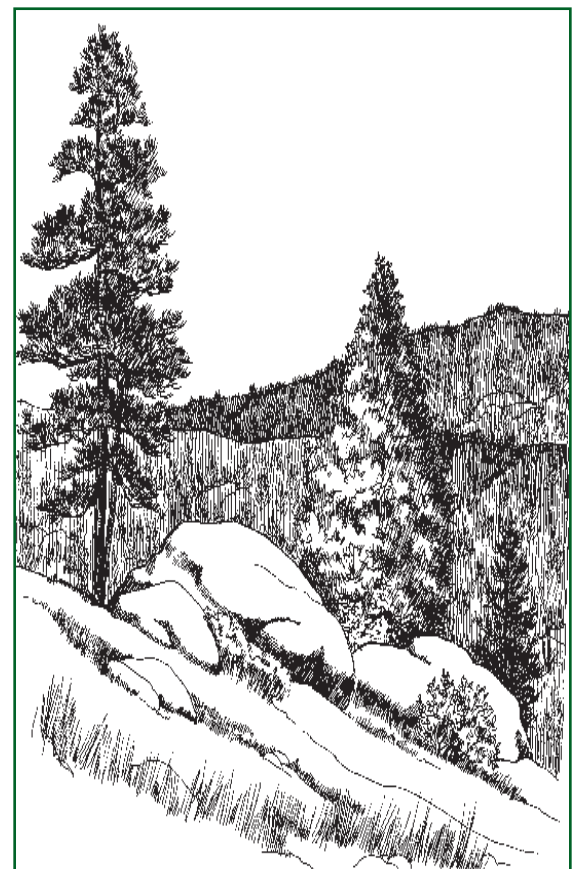


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Heil Valley Ranch

North Foothills Open Space

BOULDER COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



Plants

The diversity of wildlife found here is partly due to the diversity of vegetation.

Much of the land is covered by ponderosa pine forest. You can spot a ponderosa pine by its reddish bark, butterscotch smell and clusters of two or three needles that grow up to seven inches long.

The ponderosa pine's resistance to drought help make it the most widely distributed tree in the western United States. Its root system can snake down as far as 35 feet and spread out as far as 100 feet around its trunk. Their thick bark also helps them be more fire resistant than some other tree species.

Among the ponderosa pines, a variety of shrubs thrive including mountain mahogany, three-leaf sumac, bitterbrush and wax currant. These shrubs provide coverage for small mammals and food for deer. Shrublands on

the Front Range are increasingly rare due to development.

As you walk through open meadows you'll also see patches of New Mexico feathergrass with its beautiful feathery awns as well as big bluestem grass and little bluestem grass.

History

People have lived on what is now known as Heil Valley Ranch for thousands of years. Prehistoric habitation and use of northeastern Colorado covers approximately 12,000 years, but the most reliable archeological sites in the Heil Valley area date back 5,000 years.

Four prehistoric sites (i.e. Native American sites used prior to contact with Anglo settlers) are on the property at Heil Valley Ranch. The first Anglo populations in the area were most likely beaver trappers exploring nearby rivers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In 1888, Solomon Geer became the first settler to patent land on the Heil Valley Ranch property. Solomon's wife Nancy Phinox Geer was one of the first Anglo females to reside in Boulder City. Five years later, Joel Plumlee and Charles Ingersoll also patented portions of the property.

You can visit a few historic sites found at Heil Valley Ranch. The Whitestone and Vickery Quarry Complex along the Picture Rock Trail, operated from the 1890s to the 1960s, and was one of the more important quarry operations in the Lyons area. Lyons sandstone was mined there and can be seen in buildings on the University of Colorado campus.

In the early 1900s, Charley Pace acquired the land, then sold it to the Johnson family, who sold the land to Orville and Mabel Pickett.

The **Lichen Loop Trail** was named for lichens, which are generally made up of two organisms, a fungus and an algae. These two components help each other survive creating an organism that can last thousands of years.

The **Wapiti Trail** is named for the Native American word that means elk.

In 1949, the Heil family purchased the land from the Picketts. The Heils grazed Herford Cattle. In the 1970s, the family ventured into tourism and recreation, providing horseback rides, hay rides, and hunting.

The majority of Heil Valley Ranch was sold to Boulder County in 1993. It was purchased in the same time frame as Hall Ranch and both are part of the North Foothills Open Space.

Management Activities

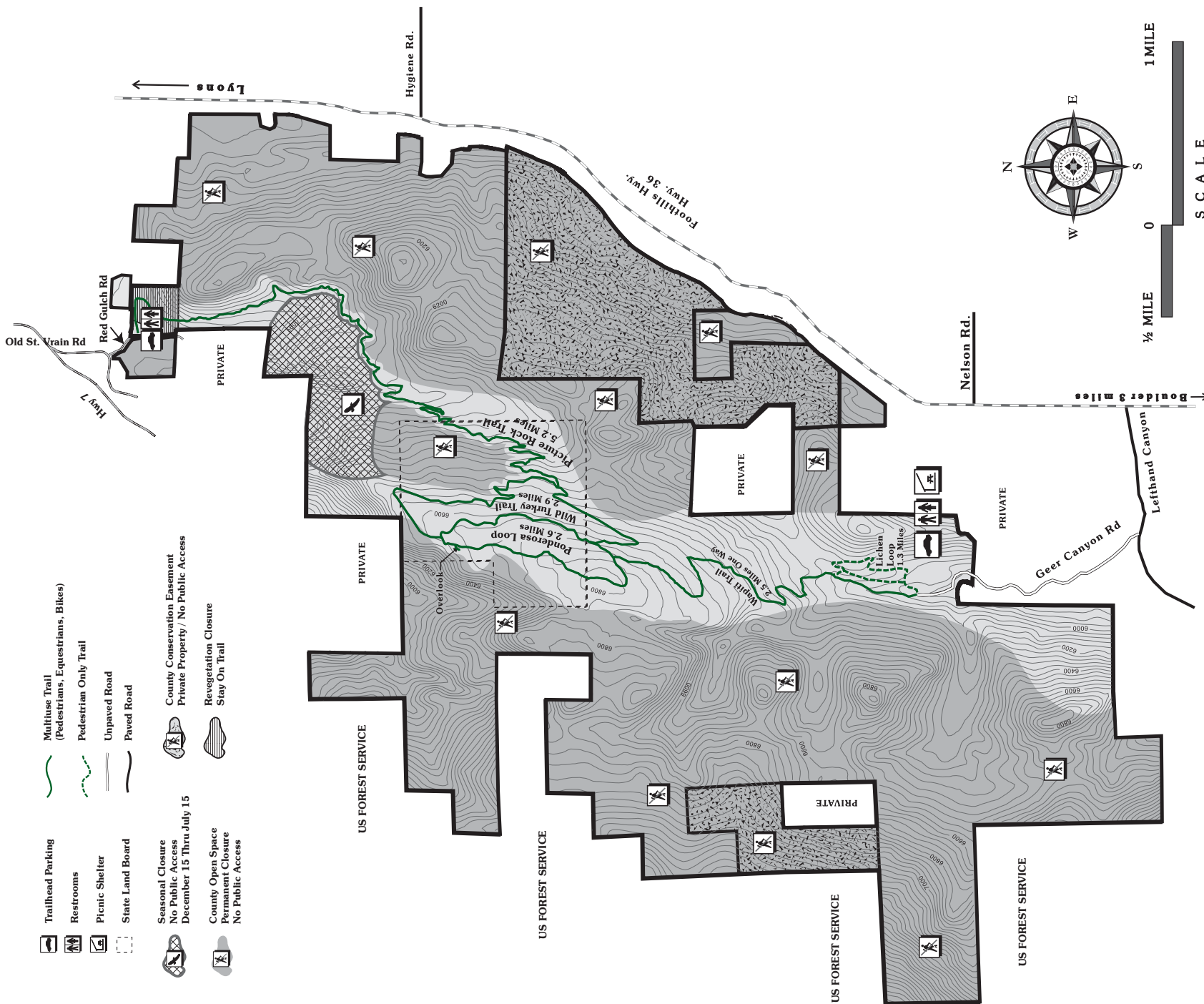
The Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department continue inventories and restoration of plant communities.

Wild fires have been suppressed on the property for at least 110 years. The results are areas of even-aged dense forests instead of a healthy ponderosa pine forest with open grassy meadows. The increased shade these trees create prevents the growth of grasses and wildflowers in the understory. Current forest management projects—prescribed burns and mechanical thinning—will increase and maintain open meadows in the ponderosa pine-savannah ecosystem.

With forest stand improvement projects, you'll likely see regeneration of grass communities, weed reduction, less crowding, and overall healthier trees. These forest management practices will also increase public safety by reducing the potential for a catastrophic wildfire. We hope you enjoy this unique open space.



Wildflowers along the Lichen Loop trail.



Trail Information		Notes
Length	Elev. Gain	
Lichen Loop 1.3-mile loop	237 ft.	pedestrian only; great for families
Wapiti 2.5 miles one-way	822 ft.	multiple use
Ponderosa Loop 2.6-mile loop	205 ft.	multiple use
Wild Turkey 2.9-mile	290 ft.	multiple use
Picture Rock 5.2 miles one-way	983 ft.	multiple use