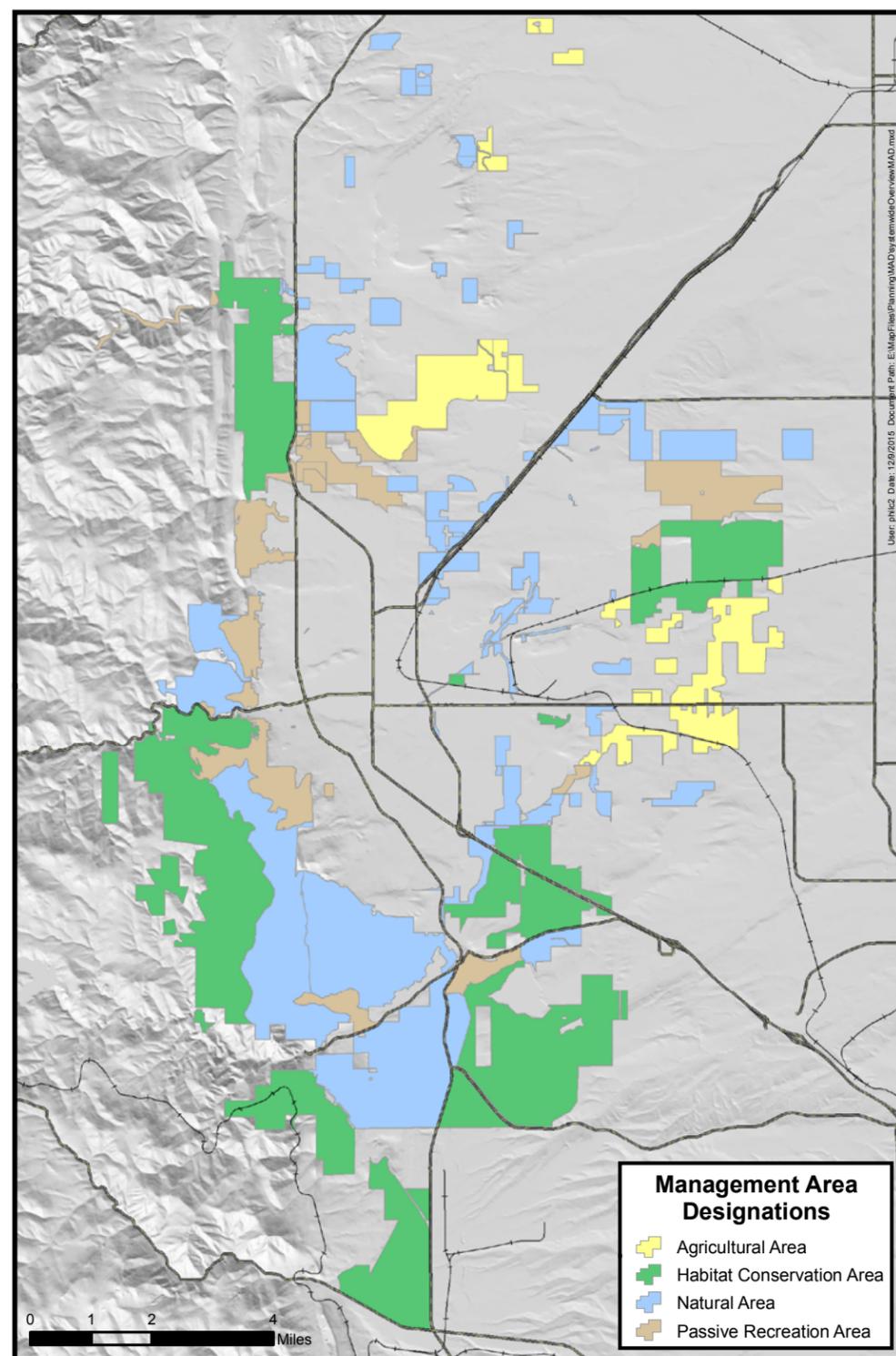


City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks

MANAGEMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS: An Overview



In 2005, the City Council accepted the Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Visitor Master Plan (VMP). The plan describes strategies to provide OSMP visitors with a high quality visitor experience, develop a sustainable infrastructure of trails and trailheads, and to do so in ways that protect ecological, cultural and agricultural values of OSMP lands. To that end, the plan established a geographic framework to prioritize and focus certain land management activities.

This management framework for OSMP includes four management area designations:

- Agricultural Areas,
- Habitat Conservation Areas,
- Natural Areas, and
- Passive Recreation Areas.

With the assumption that the quality of the environment—the “naturalness” of an area is the foundation upon which the recreational experience on OSMP lands is based, it followed that in order to meet the plan goals, the quality of the environment and the quality of the visitor experience were intertwined and should both be preserved across all management areas. These management area designations (described on page 2) provide system-wide guidance on where and how visitor services can be provided while protecting resources. Each designation communicates overarching management direction for individual OSMP properties and blocks of contiguous properties.

The framework described four management area designations. These designations—Agricultural Areas, Habitat Conservation Areas, Natural Areas and Passive Recreation Areas reflected the OSMP purposes that seemed likely to require balance and trade offs as part of a master plan focused upon visitor access and enjoyment. The management area designations provide a system-wide and high level context for how visitor services could be delivered in the context of other OSMP purposes.

Unlike urban zoning designations, OSMP management area designations not only attempt to provide a logical arrangement of where different OSMP services are best delivered, they must also be responsive to the underlying environmental conditions. There are inholdings in areas where recreation is a focus that have high natural values, and places found within areas of important ecological value where excellent recreational opportunities exist. For this reason the management area designations were designed to be flexible, allowing exceptions to the general rules.

MANAGEMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS: What do they mean for me?

Agricultural Areas

The Agricultural Area (AA) designation is used to communicate the city's emphasis on supporting sustainable agricultural operations in areas that provide especially good conditions for agriculture and/or are potentially vulnerability or incompatible with other activities. While land with other management designations can be leased for agriculture, AA is assigned to properties where intensive practices are most appropriate. Some examples of intensive agriculture include annual grains such as barley, wheat, corn; vegetables farms and fruit orchards; farms with poultry, goats, pigs and sheep; hayfields; and pastures with bulls.



Public Access

Public access is managed to enhance visitor safety and agricultural production, when crops or livestock are sensitive to trampling or disturbance. Tools include on-trail requirements, and on-leash requirements for dogs in specific places and/or at specific times.

Trail Design

In agricultural areas, the number and extent of new trails are minimized. Where trails are appropriate, access and linkages are located and managed to reduce impacts to agricultural resources from visitors and their pets.

Habitat Conservation Areas

OSMP lands play an important role in conserving biodiversity. Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs) are established where the best opportunities exist to conserve the habitat for the broadest range of species and natural systems. HCAs are generally characterized by large blocks of habitat in good condition with few designated trails, and low to moderate disturbance arising from activities on OSMP or neighboring lands. They are often areas occupied by species of concern. Management actions in HCAs are designed to support ecological systems and species and, where possible, provide public access that fosters understanding and appreciation of these areas.



Public Access

Public access is allowed in HCAs. It typically includes on-trail requirements for visitors and dogs, and on-leash requirements for dogs. Off-trail access is only allowed by permit. Visitors are also encouraged to avoid nighttime visits and instead to visit between one hour before dawn and one hour after dusk.

Trail Design

In HCAs, the number and extent of new trails are minimized. Where trails are appropriate, access and linkages are located and managed to reduce impacts to sensitive resources from visitors and their pets. Undesignated trails are actively closed and reclaimed.

Natural Areas

The ecological values in Natural Areas (NAs) tend to be less outstanding than in HCAs. However, because of the unpredictable distribution of resources, natural areas can also include hot spots (and cold spots) of species diversity and ecological importance. Agricultural land uses in natural areas tend to be moderate or non-existent. For visitors, natural areas tend to see a range of use and popularity. OSMP's goal in managing natural areas is to integrate visitor access and enjoyment with resource conservation to the greatest degree possible.



Public Access

Pedestrian access is generally unrestricted, although on-trail travel is encouraged. Areas of special sensitivity are protected by off-trail closures. Dogs are allowed to be under voice and sight control or leashed; and may be required to be leashed in areas or at times of resource sensitivity. Rock-climbing is a dominant off-trail activity and hang/para-gliding may be considered.

Trail Design

The density and design of trails is intended to sustain visitation levels, provide access to appropriate destinations and facilitate enjoyable visitor experiences while protecting other resources. The city seeks to actively close and reclaim undesignated trails while preventing the establishment of new ones.

Passive Recreation Areas

The most popular destinations on OSMP lands have been identified as Passive Recreation Areas (PRAs). These areas are managed to provide a high level of public access. For example, the city has focused investments in facilities and services supporting a high quality visitor experience in PRAs. Examples of these facilities include the Chautauqua "Ranger" Cottage, the Flagstaff Summit Nature Center, as well as enhanced signage for both wayfinding and interpretation, toilets, picnic areas and enlarged trailhead parking lots throughout the system.



Public Access

PRAs typically encourage a wide variety of activities and allow dogs under voice and sight control or leashed. On-trail travel is encouraged. There is typically a higher trail density in PRAs to address high levels of demand.

Trail Design

Trails are designed to sustain higher levels of visitation. For example, trails may be wider, have specialized surfaces, and/or diverge quickly from a single access point to distribute visitors and reduce crowding.