

## Douglas County's Sandstone Ranch and Schmidt Property Provide Key Environmental Mitigation for Chatfield Storage Reallocation Project

For the Chatfield Reservoir Mitigation Company (CRMC) and its member water providers, the partnership with Douglas County to protect portions of its newly acquired open space properties, Sandstone Ranch and Schmidt Property, was vital to receiving the environmental mitigation credits needed to successfully implement the Chatfield Storage Reallocation Project (CSRP).

When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) approved the reallocation of 20,600 acre-feet of water storage space at Chatfield Reservoir from flood control to multi-purpose use, it also required the CSRP to address the environmental impacts as identified in the Compensatory Mitigation Plan (CMP), which included on- and off-site environmental mitigation for Preble's meadow jumping mouse, bird habitat, and wetlands. While the priority was to provide targeted environmental mitigation within Chatfield State Park, it was understood that not all of the environmental credits would be achieved on-site. After several years of locating, studying, and pursuing preservation of off-site properties, the CSRP was able to find a strong partnership in Douglas County and successfully protect portions of Sandstone Ranch and Schmidt properties to earn the remaining environmental credits needed.

Both Sandstone Ranch and Schmidt Property are valuable additions to Douglas County's open space program. Douglas County recently opened the first phase of the historic Sandstone Ranch to public access, which includes 12-miles worth of non-motorized multi-use trails to take in the expansive views of mountains, meadows, and red rock formations.

*"We are beyond thrilled that these two incredible properties have been protected and that they will be managed by Douglas County Open Space and Natural Resources, one of the finest open space programs within the state of Colorado,"* stated Charly Hoehn, CRMC's General Manager. *"On Colorado's Front Range, open space is difficult to acquire, let alone open space of this unrivaled historical, wildlife, and habitat value."*

As five of the nine current CRMC-member water providers are located within Douglas County, the additional water storage capacity at Chatfield Reservoir will also directly benefit the citizens of Douglas County by providing an additional renewable water resource to the water districts' portfolios.

### **Sandstone Ranch**



*Sandstone Ranch has been a working ranch since the late 1800s.*

Sandstone Ranch is a historic 2,038-acre property, intersected by West Plum Creek and Gove Creek near Larkspur, Colorado. The property shares 3.5 miles of its western border with Pike National Forest. Sandstone Ranch is known to be one of the oldest working ranches within Colorado, operating for more than 150 years. Along with several preserved buildings dating back to the 1870s, the property also features diverse landscape and habitat features including red rock formations, meadows, and lush riparian corridors, which provide for abundant wildlife and vegetation resources.



*View of Sandstone Ranch – Pike National Forest in the background.*

The opportunity to protect this important piece of Douglas County's history was almost lost. In 2006, Sandstone Ranch was purchased with the intention of turning it into a 114-home development. The plan was later abandoned, and Sandstone Ranch found itself back on the market in 2017.

In January 2018, Douglas County purchased Sandstone Ranch for \$18.75 million, in large part with sales and use tax revenue from the 1994 voter-approved Douglas County Open Space Fund. Such revenues are exclusively dedicated to the protection of open space as well as for funding County parks. CRMC provided \$6 million to Douglas County to protect certain portions of the ranch to achieve the environmental credits CRMC needed in association with the CSR.



*View from a high point within Sandstone Ranch. Very few open vistas like this one are left along the Front Range.*

The protected portions of Sandstone Ranch for CRMC's off-site mitigation features a rich riparian corridor. It provides expansive nesting, roosting, and foraging areas along the North American Central Flyway, which is critical to migratory birds - many of which have also been seen at Chatfield Reservoir. Since April 2018, more than 130 bird species have been documented at the ranch. The protected portions also preserve valuable habitat for cottonwoods and Preble's meadow jumping mouse as well as serves as a wildlife corridor for game species.



*A view of a protected area along West Plum Creek on Sandstone Ranch.*

Staying true to its open space mission, Douglas County [recently announced](#) that Sandstone Ranch is now open to public access. A new parking lot off of Highway 105 provides hikers, cyclists, and horseback riders access to [12 miles of non-motorized trails](#).

*“The Sandstone Ranch acquisition preserved so much more than 2,038 acres of land,”* said Roger Partridge, Douglas County Commissioner and Board Chair. *“It has preserved the County’s history, heritage, wildlife habitat, as well as other cultural and natural resources.”*

The opening of Sandstone Ranch’s public access follows an extensive planning process involving public input, which culminated in the adoption of the [Sandstone Ranch Master Plan](#). In coordination with CRMC’s Sandstone Ranch Management and Monitoring Plan, which provides guidance for management of the CSR’s protected portions, Douglas County’s Master Plan provides a vision for Sandstone Ranch that balances appropriate public access while conserving the historic ranching operations, wildlife habitat and corridors, connectivity to Pike National Forest, native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources.

*“We recognize the value of this acquisition to our citizens’ quality of life, and we take seriously the responsibility to balance the preservation and protection of the Ranch with the opportunity for public access,”* said County Commissioner Abe Laydon.



*Sandstone Ranch in early winter 2019. Red sandstone rock formations capped with snow.*

### **Schmidt Property**

The Schmidt Property is approximately 520 acres and is located along Garber Creek south of Sedalia, Colorado. The westernmost portion of the property is approximately 0.6 miles from the Pike National Forest.



*View from Schmidt Property's northern parcel.*

In late 2017, the Schmidt Construction Company graciously donated the property to Douglas County. Originally purchased by Schmidt Construction as a potential source for extracting gravel materials, the heavily wooded and steep terrain proved to be ill-suited for that purpose. The property has been wholly undeveloped, with limited to no recreational use for at least the last few decades. Due in large part to the property's remoteness, Schmidt Property contains a number of natural resources pertinent to CRMC's environmental mitigation needs, including bird and Preble's meadow jumping mouse habitat, as well as wetlands.

Currently, a master plan for the Schmidt Property has not been developed and no plans for immediate public access have been made; however, Douglas County Open Space and Natural Resources intends to open the Schmidt Property to the public in the future.

### **Importance of Off-Site Environmental Mitigation**

After more than three decades of studying and planning, and two years of construction of the required on-site recreational modifications and environmental mitigation at Chatfield State Park, securing the off-site environmental mitigation credits was the last major hurdle for CRMC and its member water providers to meet the implementation requirements and receive the permanent right to store water in the new reallocation pool at Chatfield Reservoir.

Due in large part to the collaboration of the project's partners on the federal, state, county, and local levels, CSRP received final approval for the protection of the environmental mitigation credits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in April 2020. As a result of receiving this important approval, CRMC was able to demonstrate that all the CSRP implementation requirements had been achieved, both on- and off-site of Chatfield Reservoir. Subsequently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued its final approval in May 2020.

*"It was my honor to represent Douglas County on the talented committee that worked alongside CRMC last year, which led to an agreement allowing Douglas County to manage the environmental credits for both Sandstone Ranch and the Schmidt Property. We were successful because of the excellent work of all of the partners,"* said Lora Thomas, Douglas County Commissioner.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For questions contact us at [info@chatfieldreallocation.org](mailto:info@chatfieldreallocation.org).

For detailed information on the Chatfield Storage Reallocation Project,  
or to view the project video, please go to our website  
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