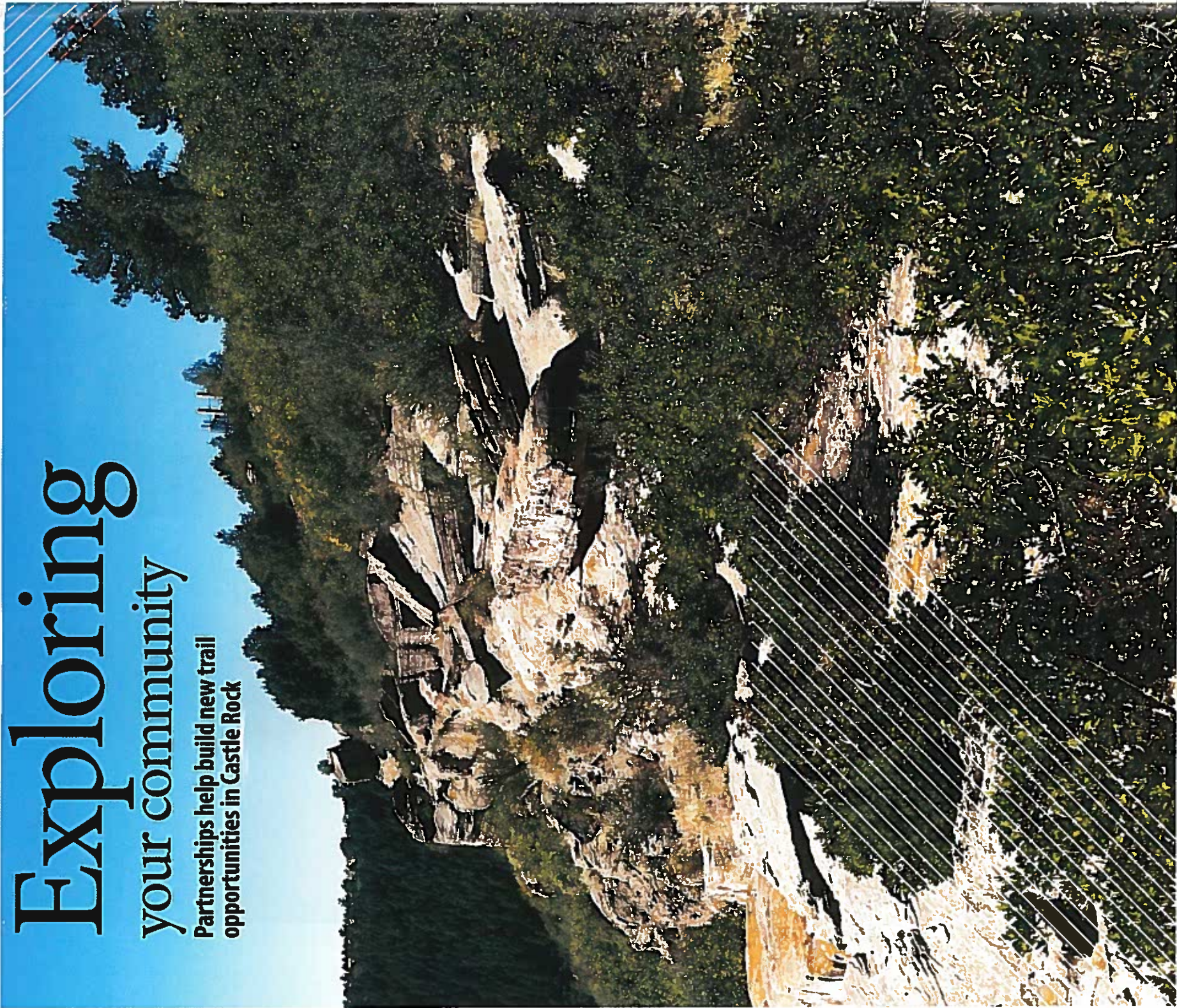


Exploring your community

Partnerships help build new trail opportunities in Castle Rock



Tucked in the eastern portion of Castle Rock, Gateway Mesa is one of the community's most valued open spaces. Many residents have walked across the flat caprock and through the open grassland and scrub oak the property provides. But, trail users may not realize there's a whole different world waiting to be explored below the mesa.

Gateway Mesa consists of more than 275 acres of grassland mesa and mixed ponderosa-fir forest. The property offers native-surface trails and expansive views of the Cherry Creek Basin. And, that's just the start.

Below the flat open grassland lies a unique forested portion of the property complete with a dense mature tree canopy, wetland understory and unique rock formations. It's a different habitat than anywhere else in Castle Rock, and creating access to that is a priority for the Parks and Recreation Department.

"We are really excited about this undiscovered part of Gateway Mesa," said Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Jeff Smullen. "We know our residents love parks and trails, and we understand the importance of expanding access to open space."

In the 2019 Community Survey, 84 percent of respondents had visited the Town's trails or open spaces in the past 12 months. Additionally, when asked to rank priorities regarding potential parks and recreation improvements, most respondents ranked developing new trails among the top priorities.

"We knew Gateway Mesa had untapped potential for a unique trail experience," said Smullen. "But, the terrain and hiking-only restrictions require a more hand-built approach of construction. With the potential to extend the trail almost 2 miles, that is not a small task."

That's where Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and the Castle Rock Parks and Trails Foundation come in. A new hiking-only trail named Legacy Trail will connect to the existing Chuck's Loop Trail at Gateway Mesa. Once complete, the trail will open a new area for exploration unlike anything else in Town.

The Castle Rock Parks and Trails Foundation decided to support the project through fundraising. This support means at least half of the project will be funded solely through donations. The foundation's support was also instrumental in enlisting help from Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado is a statewide organization that provides a volunteer workforce for outdoor stewardship projects, including invasive species management, habitat restoration, recreation improvements, and trail construction and maintenance. While designed by the Town's trails planner, the new 2-mile, soft-surface trail is being built by volunteers coordinated through the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado program.

"So far, we've only held one work day," said VOC Seasonal Field Projects Coordinator Alex Williams. "We've already recorded more than 830 volunteer hours. That's amazing and really speaks to how important this partnership is for the community."

Due to the length of the new trail and the terrain, the project is being completed in multiple phases. That means the community has the opportunity to get involved. Two more work days are scheduled this year, and additional volunteer opportunities are on the way.

The department knows it's partnerships like this that really provide the community with the biggest bang for its buck. Much of this new trail will be funded through an anonymous donation. With careful planning, the Town is able to do more with less money.

"In Castle Rock, we are lucky to have great access to the outdoors," said Smullen. "Any opportunity we have to get people outside, exploring their community, we are going to take."

Looking to get involved? Learn more about future Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado work days at CRgov.com/TrailsDay. There is also additional information about the Town's 87 miles of trails and more than 6,000 acres of open space on the Town's website – CRgov.com/Trails.