

# Backcountry project work violates DougCo zoning

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A part of the backcountry wilderness area managed by the Highlands Ranch Community Association.

 *By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / Sept. 16, 2022*

**[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.]** — Douglas County zoning violations occurred when the [Highlands Ranch Community Association](#) built a parking lot and other structures in an off-limits portion of an 8,200-acre open space conservation area.

The county commissioners discussed the matter with association officials on Sept. 6.

The land belongs to the association but was divided into planning areas. A parking lot, tents, sheds and corrals were outside those areas. The association also has 40 horses on site, twice the allowed number.

The areas are near a law enforcement training center off U.S. Highway 85 on Ron King Trail. The violations resulted from neighbors' complaints earlier this year.

### **Association admits violations**

Woody Bryant, an association engineering consultant, said amending the Highlands Ranch planned development and approving a site improvement plan for the land could resolve the zoning issues.

"There was some work done that we acknowledge we shouldn't have done without approvals from the county," he said. "That was our mistake and we acknowledged that there was a parking lot that was put in. So there's additional impervious area which has water quality and storm runoff

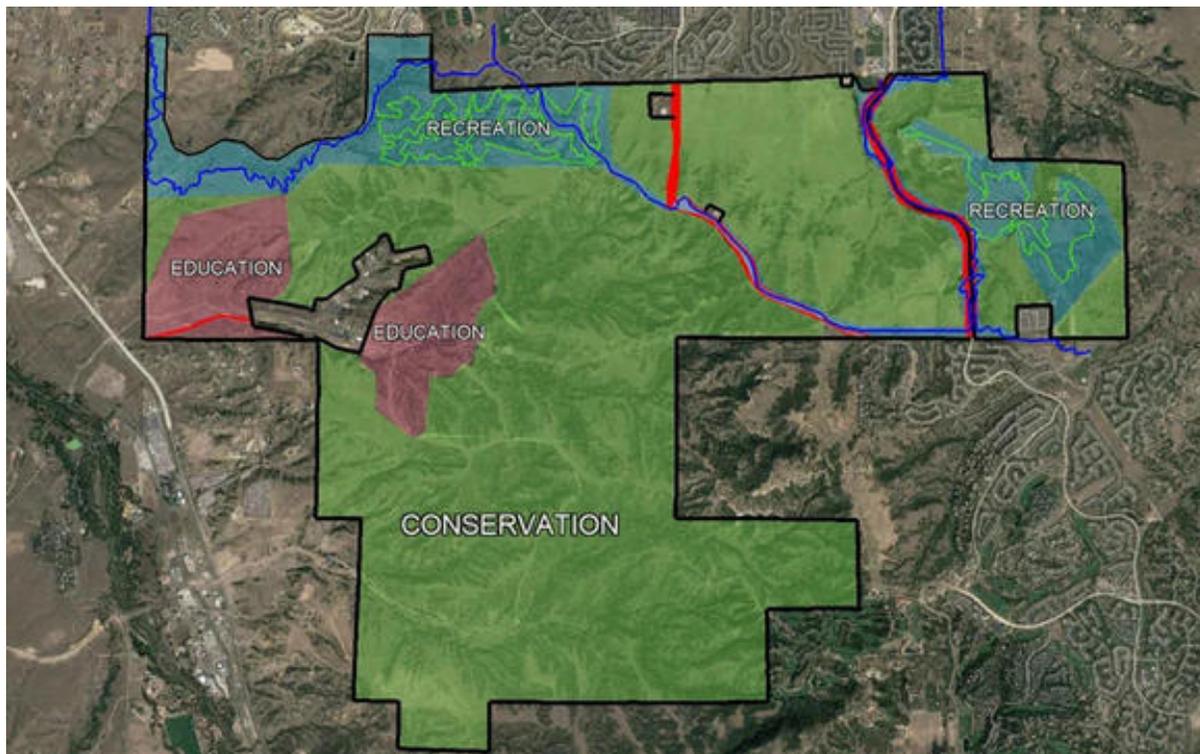
concerns. We acknowledge those were done inappropriately and we're not gonna make any excuses for doing that."

Mark Giebel, backcountry wilderness area supervisor for the association, said the program uses the training building to shelter program participants during storms.

"That's a little bit nerve wracking for us, that we're dependent on that relationship with the law enforcement facility and we would like to build our own building," he said. "So we're gonna operate independently and not be dependent on a neighbor for shelter."

The work was part of the association's [backcountry outdoor center](#) project. It will include an environmental education center, a licensed nature preschool and staff offices, plus an indoor riding arena.

Approval of the planned development amendment and site improvement plan would let the association proceed with its project.



A map showing the four planning areas in the backcountry wilderness area managed by the Highlands Ranch Community Association.

## **County actions limited**

Commissioner Lora Thomas wrote in her weekly email newsletter that the county warned the association to stop the development until permits were issued, but work continued through completion.

"While I have been in disagreement with my fellow commissioners regarding their egregious disregard of the proper process AND our county's lack of serious enforcement for these projects," Thomas wrote, "there is

little that can be practically done at this point other than strongly urging (the association) to IMMEDIATELY get into compliance."

County staff noted the planning areas were set in collaboration with Shea Properties, a party to the county's open space conservation agreement. Some of the land was donated to the association by [Shea Properties](#), one of the Highlands Ranch builders, in 2006.

The conservation easement will need agreement between the county, the association, Shea Properties and the Tall Bull Memorial Council that maintains the Tall Bull Memorial Grounds at Daniels Park.

Commissioner George Teal urged the association to help the county quickly resolve the violations.

"Please be responsive. Let's have the afterburners going," Teal said. "There is going to be back and forth as discovery goes through and regulatory checks go through. Best thing you could do is be responsive ... Let's not twaddle. Let's move it."

County zoning officials said the planned development amendment should be complete within six months.