

# Landowners striving to protect Gulch

**P**rotect and preserve" is fighting language in land use. For property owners who love where they live, *protect and preserve* means defending against overbuilding or what they see as inappropriate development.

For individuals who want to cut up the land to build more structures, *protect and preserve* is an aggravating obstruction to making money. Some of the state's best — or worst? — battles center on P&P.

Consequently, Jefferson County landowners' efforts in Crawford Gulch merit attention. The area is bounded on the north by a 1,500-acre ranch in acquisition negotiations by Jefferson County Open

Space, nestled between Golden Gate State Park and White Ranch Open Space, south to Golden Gate Canyon Road. It's mountainous, with still much ranching, though houses are starting to show all around.

The North Mountains Community Plan's goal for the area is "orderly, sensitive growth . . .

while retaining and protecting its natural beauty, rural character and existing quality . . . including water, air and wildlife habitat."

That seems impossible under current zoning permitting 5- and 10-acre parcels, as burgeoning growth looms nearer.

So a landowners group is requesting that more than 10,000 acres be rezoned to A-35, permitting only one dwelling unit per 35 acres. They've gotten signatures in support from 85 percent of the owners, representing 90 percent of the land.



**JOANNE  
DITMER**

"We think it's the first time in Colorado that 35-acre zoning is being sought to *preserve* property and its values. . . . Usually it's used to permit more development," Patti Neer said.

Neer, who's lived in Crawford Gulch for two years, Mary Ramstetter, a 40-year resident, and Pat Foss, who's lived all his life in Golden and the Gulch, regaled me with maps and statistics to show why they believe the zoning change would preserve and enhance the land, and property values.

One map showed where all the wildlife had been spotted — an amazing bounty, and a shade misleading, in that humans had to be there to see them — but an obvious indication of how the animals move back and forth from designated open space to state park. The privately owned land is a valuable link, noteworthy since there is an abundance of deer, while the rest of the state for several years has seen deer diminish, a trend of great concern to the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

"Now there's a nice balance of small and large landowners that works for people and animals," Ramstetter said. She's done intensive historical research on the area. "The state and county have poured great amounts of dollars into both parks, and 35-acre zoning would enhance them."

"We're just a community trying to save its pretty land," said Foss, a developer. He tried an innovative approach to determine density of future development according to geology, etc., but found that people understood the 35-acre concept more easily. "We're not anti-growth, but the idea of squeezing as many units as possible onto the land, which seems the trend, would be so inappropriate here."

Most recent traffic counts on Golden Gate Canyon Road show 3,029 trips a day; the planning department calculates that every new home adds 10 trips a day to local roads. Widening the road begins destruction of the countryside.

It will take many innovative efforts to keep the attributes and rare natural beauty of Colorado that we all appreciate. It's encouraging that so many property owners in Crawford Gulch are willing to consider this different option to keep the land's beauty and future value.

They just have to remember the old adage "United we stand, divided we fall" as they plan for their community's future.

They could set an extremely valuable precedent that would benefit the entire state as well as themselves.

Joanne Ditmer has covered urban design and environmental issues for The Post since 1962.

# Crawford Gulch landowners at odds over mass downzoning

by Linda Tharp  
Transcript writer

While 87% of the landowners of the 10,440 acres in the Crawford Gulch favor a downzoning to limit development to one dwelling unit per 35 acres, a minority of landowners oppose it.

They have asked the county to exclude them from the rezoning attempt.

The Jefferson County Planning Commission last week voted to recommend approval of the downzoning with some conditions. It recommended the A-35 boundaries be redrawn to exclude protesting properties.

The commission chose that out of four possible options, including to exclude all who requested exclusion, exclude none or to exclude only those properties whose development potential would be adversely impacted.

Charles and Mary Ramstetter were instrumental in getting the citizen-initiated downzoning request to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners. They, along with the majority of

## *'I can leave my children money or I can leave my children a beautiful place to live'*

landowners, sought the low-density zoning to preserve the canyon land. They feared unrestrained growth would destroy it.

"I have two choices," said Charles Ramstetter. "I can leave my children money or I can leave my children a beautiful place to live. They can make money but they can't make beautiful land."

According to Jefferson County Planner Nick Morgan, the request is so unusual that the county doesn't even have a zoning designation for densities that low. In order to accommodate the request, he said the commissioners will have to decide three things following a public hearing Wednesday, July 2, at 6:30 p.m. in Golden. (The date was changed from Tuesday, July 1.)

The first, Morgan explained, is to create the Agricultural-35 zoning. Then the board will decide whether to rezone the 10,000-plus acres A-35 and which if any of the properties

should be excluded.

If the county does adopt an A-35 zoning, Morgan said it can be used elsewhere in the county.

But Charles Ramstetter's cousin, Karl Ramstetter, is among those who want to be excluded.

"I see no reason to be in it," Karl Ramstetter said. "I see it as taking away from some of the things we should be entitled to do with out land some day."

Charles and Karl Ramstetter share the same grandfather, Henry Ramstetter, who homesteaded in Crawford Gulch in 1915.

Their difference of opinion is not a family feud. But the Ramstetters hold some of the largest parcels of land in the gulch area, with Charles and Mary Ramstetter owning 535 acres and Karl and his wife, Louise, owning 360 acres.

Karl Ramstetter said, "There are better ways to control growth, like conservation. I understand conservation but not

preservation. Preservation means you can never do anything to the land."

He said he has owned the land his whole life, investing his time and money into the property. He does not think it is wrong to reserve the right to reap some monetary return on his property.

Ramstetter said he does not have any immediate plans to develop his land commercially or with high-density housing. If he did, he said he would have done it already.

"As time goes on, I think we're going to see where those things are needed and necessary," he said. "You can't develop a community and not have some conveniences."

Mary Ramstetter is opposed to any exemptions and has sent a letter to commissioners asking that they not exempt anyone.

"Exemptions place the whole package on a slippery slope," she wrote. "If the beauty and fragility of this region as a whole are worth protecting from suburban sprawl, the fractions, thereof, owned by A-35 opponents, are no less fragile, no less worthy of protection."

Rocky Mtn  
12/11/96

# Crawford Gulch residents campaign to rezone rural area

Concerns center on keeping area pristine by curbing development adjacent to Golden Gate

by Charley Able

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

**GOLDEN** — Residents of Crawford Gulch, fearing homesites will chop up the foothill landscape, want Jefferson County commissioners to rezone 10,440 acres to allow a maximum of one home on

35 acres.

Commissioners Tuesday authorized the county staff to begin work on details of the proposal.

Residents of the area — bounded roughly by Golden Gate Canyon Road on the south, White Ranch Open Space Park on the east and Golden Gate Canyon Park on the north and west — want the county to rezone about 17 square miles, but the county has no zoning classification for such low density properties.

It could be 6 to 8 months before a formal request is submitted to

commissioners for consideration, said Doug Reed, county development review coordinator.

Residents say they want to preserve the rural nature of the area. They are concerned about wildlife habitat, groundwater depletion, loss of mountain views, increased traffic and increased wildfire risk.

Kathy Peterson, a four-year resident of the gulch, lives on 40 acres of "the most beautiful area of Jefferson County," she said. "It is relatively untouched. The people in the area are as unique as the land. It is just something I don't

think will ever be duplicated."

"We sure don't want to have a grid-type subdivision," said Pat Foss, a builder and developer in the area. He said the intent is for density to be one house per 35 acres, although houses could be clustered together, with large tracts of open space around them.

"The wildlife has a lot to do with generating this request," Foss said. "We have elk calving grounds and a lot of things that are pretty important to everybody up there."

The rezoning proposal was

drawn up after the commissioners approved the Window Rock subdivision in the area. That development off Belcher Road is made up of 10-acre homesites.

Dorothy Bowles, the Window Rock developer, told the commissioners she opposes a blanket rezoning of the area.

"I think that an individual property owner has the right to determine the future of their property," Bowles said. "If an individual owner objects to this rezoning, I don't think it should be forced on them."

ADAMS  
ARAPAHOE  
BOULDER

# SUBURBS

DOUGLAS  
JEFFERSON

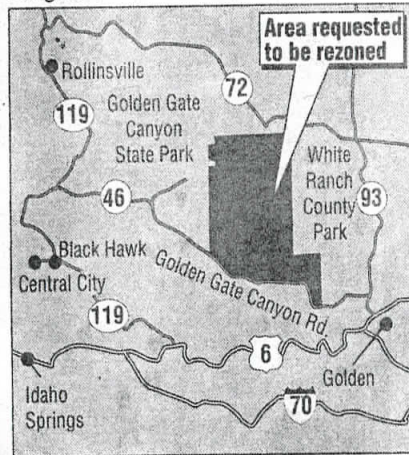
## Jeffco panel weighs rezoning plan

By Keith Coffman

Special to the Denver Post

### Proposed downzoning

Jeffco commissioners will consider whether to downzone close to 10,000 acres north of Golden Gate Canyon Road at a meeting tonight.



The Denver Post

JEFFERSON COUNTY — County commissioners tonight will take up a controversial proposal that aims to limit sharply the development on a huge parcel of land northwest of Golden.

The initiative, backed by some area landowners, would affect 10,000 acres near Golden Gate Canyon and Crawford Gulch. If approved, it would allow only one house per 35 acres on the land, considered by many to be a key remnant of Jeffco's rural past. Current zoning allows one house per 10 acres.

Kevin Nichols, Jeffco's comprehensive planning coordinator, said other county residents have banded together before to change zoning, but never on such a large scale.

"It's unique for that reason because this is vast acreage," Nichols said.

The area is a sprawling 17-square-mile tract bordered on the south by

### Proposal limits development on 10,000-acre area

Golden Gate Canyon Road, both east and west of Crawford Gulch.

Mary Ramstetter, who owns 335 acres with her husband, said if the measure isn't approved, development eventually will affect the county water supply and strain area roads. It also will destroy important animal habitats, she said.

"It's a wonderful wildlife area," she said.

But some area property owners believe the change is an infringement on their property rights, officials say.

Commissioner Patricia Holloway said some of the owners she has spoken

to want to see the zoning left as is.

"They may just not want the government to tell them what to do," she said. "Property rights could be their issue."

Holloway said some owners want to opt out of the new zoning, but she hasn't heard of any of that have any specific plans for development.

Commissioner Michelle Lawrence said that "more people are calling," asking to get out of any new zoning imposed on the property. She said she is not sure how she will vote on the matter.

"We'll have to listen to the testimony," she said.

The commission will hold its public hearing on the issue at 6:30 p.m. tonight in the county administration building at 100 Jefferson County Parkway in Golden. The board then can decide if it wants to create a new district and then rezone the area into the district.



## \$100,000 taken in robbery

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## This 'takings' is wonderful

The *Transcript* tends to be a fiscally conservative newspaper. Property rights are something we respect. "Takings" are something we oppose. So when people talk about "downzoning," it typically would raise our ire. But there is something so unusual, so amazing that we need to break out of our box and applaud a downzoning proposed in Jefferson County.

Ten thousand acres in Golden Gate Canyon are being suggested for a mass downzoning. Right now, the land can be developed at a density of one house per 10 acres. That means 1,000 homes that could be built in the canyon.

About 85% of the landowners are asking Jefferson County to change their zoning to a specially created category called Agricultural-35. That would permit only one house per 35 acres. Note, please, landowners themselves are asking the county do this to them. They are proposing the "taking." It is landmark. It is revolutionary.

Sure, there are people who are asking to be excluded, and the county will have to make rulings on their requests. For example, one well-known family is split by the pending rezoning. Karl Ramstetter, according to Jefferson County, owns about 360 acres that he wants excluded. His relative, Mary Ramstetter, owns about 570 acres, and she is spearheading the downzoning.

Even though there are differences and some people may need to be excluded, most people are delighted the county is making this new zoning available and moving the citizen-requested downzoning through the decision making process. The Jeffco Planning Commission met Wednesday and recommended approval of the downzoning - with some exemptions, including Karl Ramstetter's land - and also recommended adoption of the new A-35 zoning. The next step is the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners. A hearing is set for **Tuesday, July 1, at 9 a.m.**

As a little history, since it doesn't yet exist, this would be the first time the zoning could be used, but it is not the first downzoning in Jeffco. About two years ago, Evergreen residents successfully convinced Jeffco to downzone part of Hiwan Hills. But this 10,000-acre action in the canyon is much bigger in comparison and perhaps that is why interest has been expressed from around the nation to see what Jeffco does.

It proves landowners and developers can have a social conscience, can hug a tree, can be environmentally sensitive - and still can make a buck without ruining the environment for future generations. Some, including Pat Foss and landowner Harvey Mozer, are developing their project as if the A-35 zoning already were in effect - voluntarily. Foss and Mozer are developing Red School Ranch on about 500 acres one house per 35 acres. That one house can cost a million dollars, but its only a total of 14 homes, not 50, in the rolling foothills.

Developers, in most cases, are savvy people. They know too much development can damage the health and welfare of a community - and damage their investments. They want to see elk and bears. They want land on which their children can ride horses and watch eagles soar. And we applaud them.

Golden Transcript  
ISSN 0746-6382  
Founded by General George C. West in 1898

A journal of life in and around the city of Golden, Colorado, GOLDEN TRANSCRIPT is published each Friday by GOLDEN MEDIA INC., with offices at 1000 Tenth Street, Telephone (303) 279-5541. JEFFERSON COUNTY TRANSCRIPT and WHEAT RIDGE TRANSCRIPT are published each Friday.  
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Periodicals postage paid at Golden, Colorado 80401. POSTMASTER: Send address changes and USPS Form 3579 to GOLDEN TRANSCRIPT, P.O. Box 987, Golden, Colorado 80402  
Subscription rate: \$33 per year in Jefferson County, Colorado; \$47 per year elsewhere.



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# Jeffco to decide on unique zoning proposal tonight

By Charley Able

Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

**GOLDEN** — Jefferson County commissioners decide tonight whether to institute a unique zoning category that would limit development in certain areas to one single-family residence on a 35-acre lot.

The category, A-35, is a citizen-initiated standard sought by landowners in the Crawford Gulch area who fear more dense development destroys the quality of life.

"One of the things I feel certain will be better protected if we adopt this will be wildlife. That is foremost in my mind," said Dave Radovich, a resident of Schoolhouse Road and a Jefferson County teacher.

About 85 percent of Crawford Gulch residents favor the zoning request, which is proposed as a voluntary change that would not apply to landowners who wish to be excluded.

Most of those who oppose the designation, including the Gilpin-Jefferson County Livestock Association and the Golden Gate Grange, do so from a property rights standpoint.

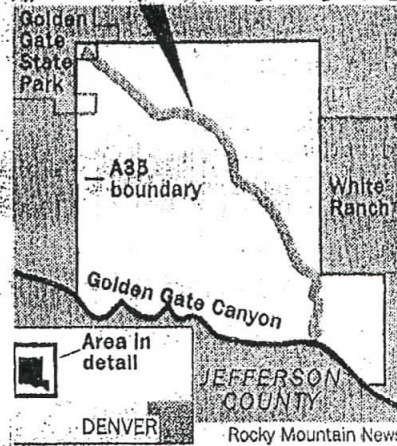
"If those folks would like to have their land 'covenanted,' that's their business. But they don't need to be telling me that I have to do it," said Karl Ramstetter, a resident of Golden Gate Canyon Road.

"A neighbor can't rezone another neighbor. But, if that's the case, I think I will seek rezoning for some of them. We'll put in an industrial/hazardous waste rezoning for them if it works both ways," Ramstetter said in jest.

The proposal would reduce pressure on groundwater resources, minimize congestion and reduce pollution, according to a Jefferson County report.

## CRAWFORD GULCH

Jefferson County considers large acreage zoning



The downzoning request came from landowners who became alarmed when they realized the county's zoning in the area allowed the higher density housing. They worried that encroaching development would affect their water supply, cause increased traffic and negatively impact area wildlife. The canyon is home to elk, deer, mountain lions and bears.

Mary Ramstetter, one of the limited growth proponents, said she was pleased with the commissioners' decision. "I think it's a great thing — it's a pretty small percentage of land that is excluded" from the downzoning, she said.

The county's planning and zoning commission had recommended that just the owners along the perimeter of the area be excluded from the downzoning. But more owners from the interior of the property recently decided to opt out.

The end result is a "few pieces of Swiss cheese," Commissioner John Stone said Thursday.

"This is not what everyone wanted, but we still end up with a jewel," he said. "It's a beautiful valley that no one wanted to see cluttered up."

# Jeffco zoning deal OK'd

By Keith Coffman

Special to The Denver Post

GOLDEN — Attempting to employ the wisdom of King Solomon, the Jefferson County commissioners approved a plan to sharply curtail housing development on the bulk of the rural Golden Gate Canyon and Crawford Gulch areas northwest of Golden.

But they also will allow landowners who oppose scaling back the current housing standard to opt out of the plan.

In a unanimous vote Wednesday, the three-member panel adopted the compromise, which came down to a battle of property rights versus preservation of one of the last unfragmented wildlife areas in the county. Reaction from both sides of the issue was mixed.

Resident Dave Radovich, who lives on 35 acres in the central portion of the area, acknowledged the compromise was better than nothing but said the panel's decision "takes the teeth" out of the citizen-driven initiative.

"Letting whoever wants out to get out leaves some room for developers," he said. "We were hoping the county would be more proactive in preserving what's left of the foothills environment."

The board approved a new "A-35" zoning category that allows only one home to be built per 35 acres. The area's current designation allows one home per 10 acres.

Of the 10,212 acres at issue, 9,100 acres will be under the less dense restriction. The remaining 1,100 acres will retain the old zoning designation.



# Jeffco to study landowners' request for downzoning

by Linda Tharp  
*Transcript writer*

It is part of the largest contiguous wildlife area in Jefferson County, and nearly 90% of the Crawford Gulch property owners within the undeveloped 10,440 acres have asked the county to downzone the land to preserve the region's natural beauty and wildlife habitat.

Currently, the area is zoned Agricultural-Two and can be developed at an overall density of one dwelling unit per 10 acres.

Pat Foss, Mary Ramstetter and Patti Neer are among the Crawford Gulch area residents asking for the rezoning, saying the density allowed by the existing zoning, if developed, would destroy what exists today.

As Neer explained, the more than 10,000 acres at issue is bordered by Golden Gate State Park to the west and White Ranch Open Space Park to the east.

The land on the north border is currently being considered for purchase by Jefferson County Open Space.

Golden Gate Canyon Road borders the land to the south.

Neer said that to develop the land in question at those densities would seal off the natural wildlife link between the Open Space properties.

Mountain lions, bears, mule deer, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, red-tailed hawks, elk, red fox, wild turkeys, marmots and coyotes all call the Crawford Gulch area home.



Mary Ramstetter

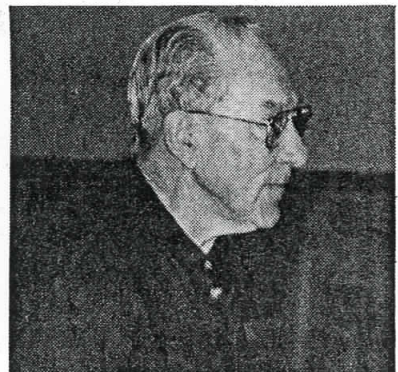
Residents petitioned the county to downzone the area to allow only one dwelling unit per 35 acres.

While there are no plans to sell off huge portions of the land, the three say residents saw the need to protect the area now rather than try to fight a developer later.

Jefferson County Planner Doug Reed told the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners Tuesday that residents in the area became concerned about the future of the area when a subdivision was proposed near Open Space land, where 60 acres would be divided into six separate lots.

Foss said that probably surprised a lot of residents who thought land in that area could not be divided into lots of less than 35 acres. The petition drive and the subdivision opened the eyes of residents to that fact.

Ramstetter said once it was suggested to property owners in the Crawford Gulch region, support for the downzoning effort swelled. While that land could be sold for significantly more at



Clyde Mannon

the higher density, she said most supporters felt the tradeoff was worth preserving the wildlife habitat.

Not all of the property owners who did not sign the petition oppose the downzoning. Ramstetter said many could not be found.

But there are those who oppose the downzoning.

Clyde Mannon asked that his 47-acre property be excluded from the rezoning request to allow him the use of a caretaker's residence on his land in addition to his home.

Reed said there is a good chance the county could exclude Mannon's property.

Others had questions about the downzoning and the procedure to the county accepting public comment. With the approval of the commissioners Tuesday for county staff to move forward with researching the request, Reed said the next step would be to create a draft of the rezoning and present the draft to residents at a community meeting to see if the plan is what they had envisioned.

# Urban inroads battled

## Jeffco ranch area turns to zoning bid

By Stacie Oulton  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**GOLDEN GATE CANYON** — On the edge of urban mania, along the twisted country road that winds its way to a state park, folks still gather at the country grange for the annual beans-and-brat roast.

Mary Ramstetter ranches in Golden Gate Canyon northwest of Golden, running a 30-head cow-calf operation on more than 500 acres. Her family homesteaded the ranch off Crawford Gulch Road in 1869. On most days, her work keeps her far from the fray of downtown Denver, just a 30-minute drive away.

But for-sale signs are sprouting nearby. If urban development cuts up the canyon, Ramstetter is afraid her ranching days will end. Her neighbors believe that, too, and at one of those recent community dinners they decided to fight for their way of life.

Yesterday, they asked — and the Jefferson County commissioners agreed to consider — limiting development in the 17-square-mile area to one home every 35 acres. Currently, a developer can build on 10 acres — large by city standards but small enough to raise ranching costs beyond the limit.

### Rare unified action

The residents' request covers the largest area Jeffco has ever targeted for rezoning, said Doug Reed of the county planning department. In county history, only four citizens' groups ever have asked to rezone entire neighborhoods.

"It's pretty rare a whole community gets together" on such an issue, Reed said.

"I applaud the citizens for recognizing the (community) character is important," he said.

"The people who live up here are not your average suburbanite. There's more love of the land. There's not a fear of nature here.

### Development limits

Golden Gate Canyon residents want development limited in the 17-square miles covering the canyon. The Jefferson County Commission has decided to consider the idea.



Source: Jeffco Planning Dept.

There's an awe of nature," said resident Patti Neer, who backed the change.

"When you build a house (up here), the cows come with it," Neer joked, noting that most canyon homeowners lease their land for cattle grazing.

A recent petition in support of the rezoning drew signatures from 165 landowners. Three landowners opposed the idea because they want to subdivide their land, she said.

The canyon is one of only two spots in Jeffco where ranching still goes on. The only other place is north of Buffalo Creek, Reed said.

### Few fences

Because cows are still king in the canyon, few people have fences, allowing ranchers like Ramstetter to move their animals easily. More homes would mean more fences, Ramstetter said, making ranching costs "prohibitive."

The canyon is spread between Golden Gate State Park on the west and Jeffco's White Ranch Park on the east. Preserving the land would also keep the wildlife link between the two parks, Neer said.

The county's recent approval of a 60-acre, six-home development near White Ranch spurred the residents to action, Neer said.

That development, Window Rock, would be permitted as an already-approved subdivision even if the commissioners rezone the canyon, Reed said.

It will take about six months for planners to draft regulations for the proposed new zone, which would then be reviewed by the commissioners.