

Gunbarrel Open Space and Grassland Preserve Importance

The Gunbarrel Open Space and Eastern Grassland preserve constitute a large contiguous grassland habitat block that supports many native bird species and prairie dog colonies.

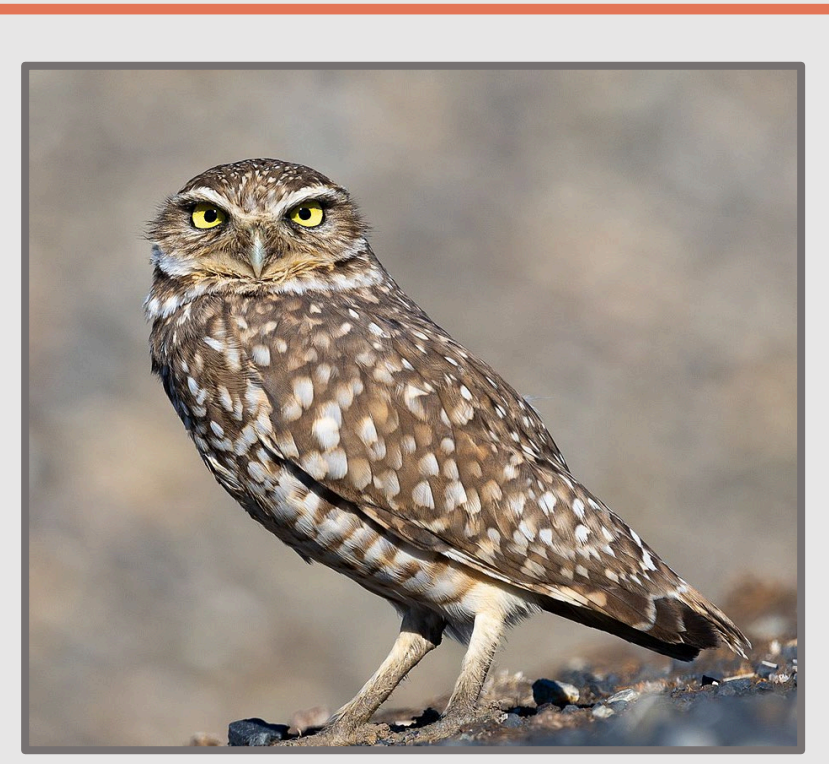
Native species in Gunbarrel Open Space and Eastern Grassland Preserve



Black-tailed prairie dog: A keystone of the prairie ecosystem, whose presence is vital to the survival of many other wildlife species (BCPOS, 2022). It is listed as a species of special concern by the City of Boulder (OSMP, 2010). Over 95% of their habitat has been lost to development, and their life cycle needs are not compatible with many current human land uses. With the loss of prairie dog habitat, there is also a decline in many important associated species, like burrowing owls, hawks, and black footed ferrets. (BCPOS, 2022).



Burrowing owl: Most frequently found using abandoned prairie dog burrows for shelter and nesting, they are sensitive to land fragmentation and human disturbance. They are listed as a species of special concern in Boulder County and recognized as a threatened species by the state of Colorado (OSMP, 2010). In 2023, there was only one successful fledgling in Boulder County and that was in the Eastern grassland preserve (OSMP, 2023). Nesting success is a direct measure of site quality, and successful nesting locations may indicate long-term commitment to an area because they tend to re-use nest sites where brood rearing was successful in the past (OSMP, 2010).



Other native species: Bald eagles, golden eagles, badgers, coyotes, foxes, rabbits, and red-tailed hawks are animals associated with intact prairie dog colonies. Many are very sensitive to human disturbance and are frequently found only in colonies distant from development and human disturbance. Raptor numbers have declined with the loss of colonies because of residential and commercial development. Research on open space lands has shown that blocks of grassland habitat more distant from urbanization are more likely to attract several of the raptor species (OSMP, 2010).



- Proposed site** of tennis complex. This 20 acres of rural land is currently zoned for agricultural use with approval for one single-family home. It's located in a rural preservation area between a prairie dog conservation zone and a critical wildlife habitat corridor. A rural preservation area is where the city and county intend to preserve and maintain rural land uses and character (BCC et al., 2020)
- View Protection Corridor:** Areas where, to the extent possible, the county shall avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts on views. There are 3 levels of protection scores: <1, 1 – 2, and >2. This corridor is in the most restrictive category (>2) and extends to N 95th St (not pictured) (BOCC & PC, 2020).

- Prairie Dog Conservation Area:** Areas where the conservation of the black-tailed prairie dog is the primary management objective and are managed opportunistically for associated species. Serves as a receiving site for relocation (OMSP, 2010). Allows prairie dogs to function with minimal human intervention without causing or experiencing impacts to or from adjacent land uses (BCPOS, 2022). It is part of the City of Boulder Open Space.
- Eastern Grassland Preserve:** Areas where prairie dogs and their associated species are part of large and ecologically diverse grassland habitat blocks and are considered the best opportunity to conserve these species (OMSP 2010). It is also designated a critical wildlife habitat, an environmental conversation area, and lands of local importance (BOCC & PC, 2020). This area has a seasonal closure from Mar. 15 – Oct 31 to protect nesting burrowing owls. It is part of city, county, and joint open space.

References
 BCPOS. (2022). Prairie Dog Habitat Element of the Grassland and Shrubland Management Policy. <https://assets.bouldercounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/prairie-dog-habitat-element-grassland-policy.pdf>
 OSMP. (2010). Grassland Ecosystem Management Plan. <https://bouldercolorado.gov/media/2430/download?inline>.
 OSMP. (2023). OSMP 2023 Annual Prairie Dog Management Meeting. <https://vimeo.com/893859732?share=copy>. 11 Dec 2023.
 BOCC & PC. (2020). Boulder County Comprehensive Plan. <https://assets.bouldercounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/bccp-boulder-county-comprehensive-plan.pdf>
 BCC, PB, CPC, & BOCC. (2020). Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan. <https://bouldercolorado.gov/media/3350/download?inline>