

## Neighborhood Mitigation Plan: The Estates at Buffalo Ridge

The Estates at Buffalo Ridge Neighborhood Mitigation Plan (NMP) is a cooperative effort between the Estates at Buffalo Ridge Homeowners Association (EBRHOA) and South Metro Fire Rescue (SMFR). It will be updated as needed.

This NMP assesses the hazards and vulnerabilities of this community and identifies a path for the community to follow by prioritizing projects to reduce risk from wildfires. It also will document accomplishments. The Wildfire Mitigation Committee will review and update this plan as needed and share it with the Estates at Buffalo Ridge Board, homeowners and other interested stakeholders.

### Community Description

The Estates at Buffalo Ridge (EBR) is a neighborhood of 88 homes within the City of Castle Pines. The neighborhood's 88 homes sit along the sloping Buffalo Ridge Road as well as a pair of short cul de sacs called Buffalo Ridge Way and Buffalo Ridge Court. Each of the homes was constructed since 2005 and only a few lots remain vacant. Lots are typically between two tenths and three tenths of an acre.

Private homes represent the majority of economic values at risk in this neighborhood, but EBR does own and operate a swimming pool and clubhouse at 1135 Buffalo Ridge Road. All utility lines are buried in this neighborhood.

The EBRHOA manages three tracts of open space covering approximately six acres within the neighborhood.

SMFR Station 36, 421 East Castle Pines Parkway, provides the first-due firefighting resources.

In a 2018 survey, residents said they enjoy living in the Estates at Buffalo Ridge because it's a small, quiet community of respectful neighbors, well-kept properties, privacy, nice views and wildlife. Proper mitigation should enhance, and at the very least not detract from, these values.

### Fire History

Although there have been no wildfires within the EBR neighborhood, the neighborhood is at-risk for wildfires because of the Gambel oak ecosystem surrounding its homes. Additionally, the neighborhood was threatened by the Cherokee Ranch Fire in October 2003. That wildfire began to the west of the neighborhood when high winds toppled a tree onto utility lines. The 1,000-acre wildfire burned eastward toward what is now the

City of Castle Pines but stopped when a cold front brought lower temperatures and higher relative humidity overnight, which helped firefighters contain the blaze.

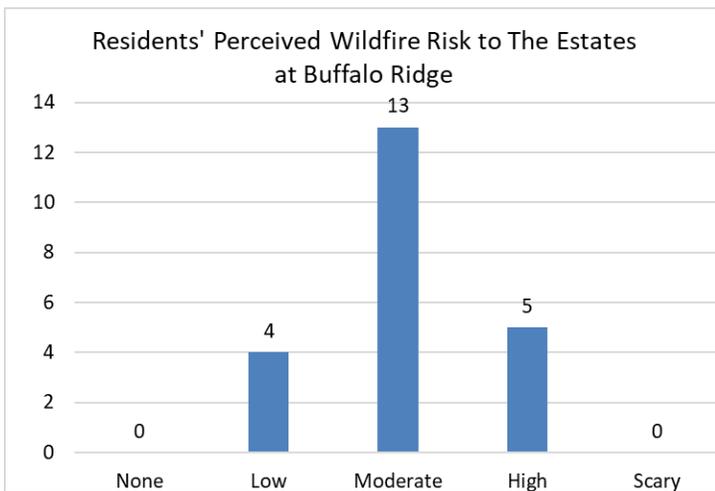
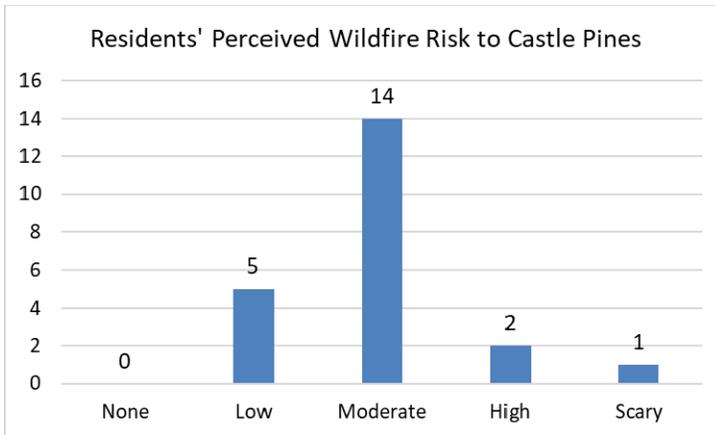
## Community Risk Assessment

As with other neighborhoods in the City of Castle Pines, The Estates at Buffalo Ridge is considered at-risk for wildfire damage. The factors that determine that assessment include its ecological context, access, property characteristics and proximity to open space.

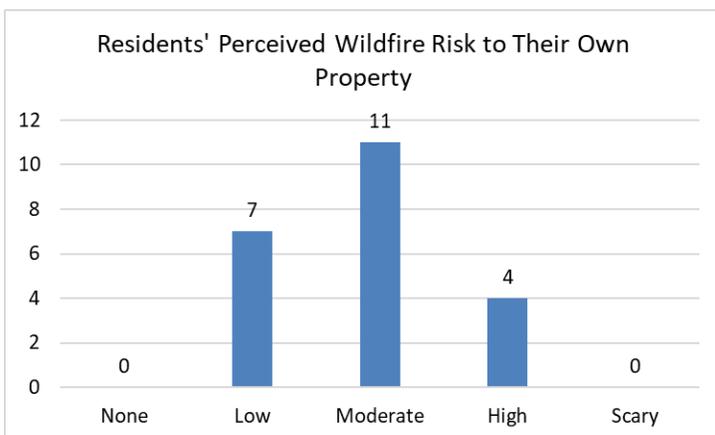
- **Ecological Context:** The City of Castle pines occupies an ecosystem that is prone to wildfires and evolved with the presence of low- to moderate-intensity wildfires. Those fires created conditions optimal for large ponderosa pines, Gambel oak, mountain mahogany, yucca and short grasses. As that vegetation grows, dies and reacts to both climate and weather, it can become vulnerable to burning. Both of EBR's parcels of open space are on slopes. Thus, a wildfire that ignites in the open space will have both slope and fuel in its favor.
- **Access:** Buffalo Ridge Road provides primary access to the neighborhood from Buffalo Trail. There is an emergency egress route at the eastern end of Buffalo Ridge Road; a gate that can be opened by emergency responders blocks regular access to Glen Ridge Drive. During an evacuation, traffic should flow one direction while emergency crews enter the neighborhood from the other entry point. However, a wildfire that impacts EBR also will impact Glen Oaks, which is the neighborhood on the other side of the emergency gate.
- **Property Characteristics:** Homes in EBR have fire-resistant roofing and exterior walls, but homeowners and landscapers have planted flammable vegetation such as junipers around homes. Homes also are constructed near each other, which increases the risk for urban conflagration scenarios.
- **Proximity to Open Space:** EBR is bisected by five acres of open space that supports robust groves of Gambel oak. The oak was mitigated by goats in 2017 and will be treated similarly in 2018. However, the effectiveness of open space mitigation is compromised when homeowners don't mitigate their backyards.

In June 2018, SMFR asked residents (through an email disseminated by the HOA) to participate in an online survey to gauge their attitudes toward wildfire risk and preparedness. Twenty-two residents participated.

Although social science researchers typically find that residents deem the community risk higher than the risk in their own neighborhood, and that risk is higher than the risk on their own properties, residents of EBR considered the neighborhood to be the riskiest of the three options as the following graphs illustrate.



While only three respondents considered the city’s wildfire risk to be high or scary, five of them considered EBR’s risk to be in the high or scary categories. Yet, respondents collectively believe their own properties face a lesser risk than the neighborhood in which they live.



Looking at individual responses also shows that risk assessments buck national trends:

Respondent	City	Neighborhood	Property
1	High	Moderate	Moderate
2	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
3	Moderate	Moderate	Low
4	Moderate	Moderate	Low
5	Low	Moderate	Moderate
6	Low	Moderate	Moderate
7	High	High	Moderate
8	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
9	Low	Low	Low
10	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
11	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
12	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
13	Low	Low	Low
14	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
15	Low	Low	Low
16	Moderate	Low	Low
17	Moderate	High	Low
18	Moderate	Moderate	High
19	Moderate	High	High
20	Scary	High	High
21	Moderate	High	High
22	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

These perceptions matter because they can indicate how willing residents are to invest their time and money in wildfire mitigation. Residents have much less control over mitigation for the city as a whole, but where they can make a difference – in their neighborhood and at home – they perceive a wildfire risk and, based on their support for Ready, Set, Goat!, are motivated to reduce that risk.

### Risk Reduction Priorities

Community risk reduction takes a village; it requires individual actions and collective action to be effective over a longer term. The HOA Board (the wildfire mitigation committee) and South Metro Fire Rescue identified several strategies for reducing the impact of wildfire for EBR that could be implemented at the local level.

- Ready, Set, Goat! participation – EBR initiated its participation in Ready, Set, Goat! in 2017 by contracting for 11 days of goat browsing. The HOA committed to 11 more days in 2018, but only needed eight because the oak had recovered less robustly than anticipated after the 2017 treatment. EBR has budgeted for goats to treat the open space again in 2019. Ready, Set, Goat! is a collaborative mitigation project with SMFR, other neighborhoods in the City of Castle Pines and the city itself.

- Treating the open space with goats is the top priority because 30% of homes are adjacent to the open space with mature groves of Gambel oak. This project efficiently reduces the most risk for the most people.
- Shared Property Mitigation – EBRHOA owns and maintains three tracts of open space in the neighborhood (See Appendix A). SMFR’s recommendations for each tract include using a combination of goats and hand-cutting to remove ladder fuels in the oak groves and thin oak groves.
- Education – EBRHOA will continue sharing opportunities to educate residents about wildfire risk utilizing resources and personnel from South Metro Fire Rescue Authority, Colorado State Forest Service, Douglas County and other entities. Those subject matter experts will attend meetings and community events, contribute to newsletters and websites, and conduct property risk assessments when requested by residents.
  - Educating homeowners about their risk, mitigation and preparedness is the second priority because education is the best tool for changing behaviors and conditions. This strategy includes home ignition zone assessments for individual property owners.
- Private Property Mitigation – Most homeowners can improve their safety by modifying growing fuels on their properties. As homes age and vegetation matures, the exposure to wildfire risk will increase.
  - Once educated, homeowners are more likely to modify their properties. This strategy is important because individual property work will leverage the mitigation done on the open space to reduce risk for EBR as well as the City of Castle Pines as a whole and emergency responders.

**Zone of Influence**

Additionally, there is an area surrounding EBR within which are characteristics that could influence a wildfire’s growth and its threat to residents and property. Mitigation within this “zone of influence” relies on partnerships and collaboration with other stakeholders to create mutually beneficial solutions to shared challenges.

- West: The golf course in this zone of influence creates a fuel break between EBR and other neighborhoods to the west, but a high-intensity fire in the Daniel’s Park area could generate enough embers to threaten this neighborhood.
- North: The fairways to the northwest and north create fuel breaks between EBR and Daniel’s Ridge, but there are groves of unmanaged oak to the north as well.
- East: Open space owned by the Glen Oaks neighborhood is due east of EBR. Glen Oaks participated in Ready, Set, Goat! in 2018 and paid for mastication of the open space in the past.

- South: The golf course in this zone of influence creates an ideal fuel break between EBR and other neighborhoods to the south.

## Communications with the Community

Utilizing the Nextdoor social media platform and HOA email blasts are the best means for communicating with EBR homeowners.

We, the undersigned, agree that this neighborhood mitigation plan creates a path for residents of The Estates at Buffalo Ridge and South Metro Fire Rescue as well as other stakeholders to address their vulnerabilities to wildfire through collaborative community risk reduction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
President, The Estates at Buffalo Ridge Homeowners Assoc.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Asst. Chief of Community Services, South Metro Fire Rescue

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix A: Maps (All images are from Douglas County GIS unless noted otherwise)

Map 1: Property Line Image

Map 2: Aerial Image from Google Earth

Map 3: Open Space A

Map 4: Open Space A - Aerial Image from Google Earth

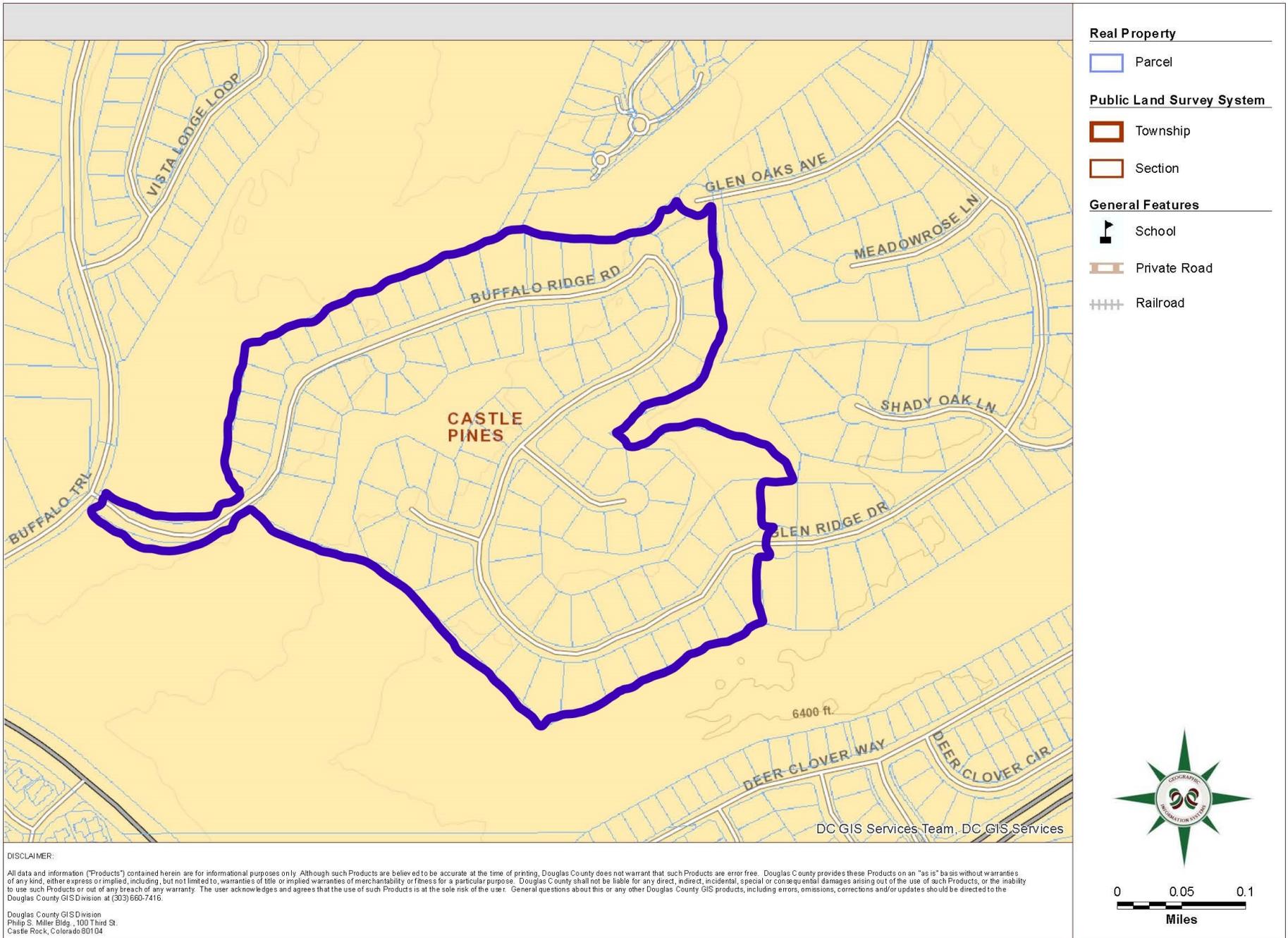
Map 5: Open Space B

Map 6: Open Space B - Aerial Image from Google Earth

Map 7: Open Space C

Map 8: Open Space C - Aerial Image from Google Earth

# Map 1: Image from Douglas County GIS



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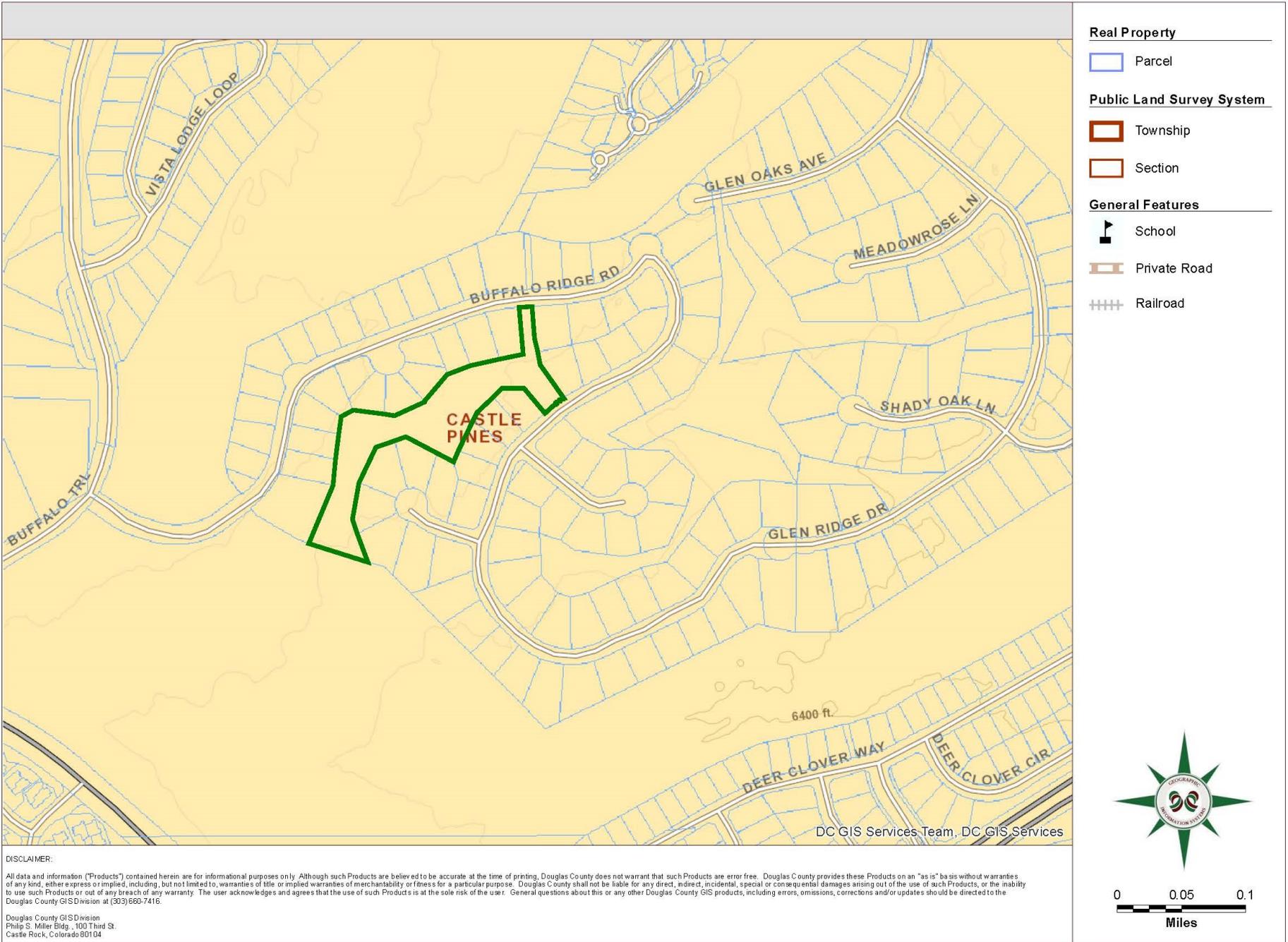
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Map 2: Aerial Image from Google Earth



# Map 3: Open Space A



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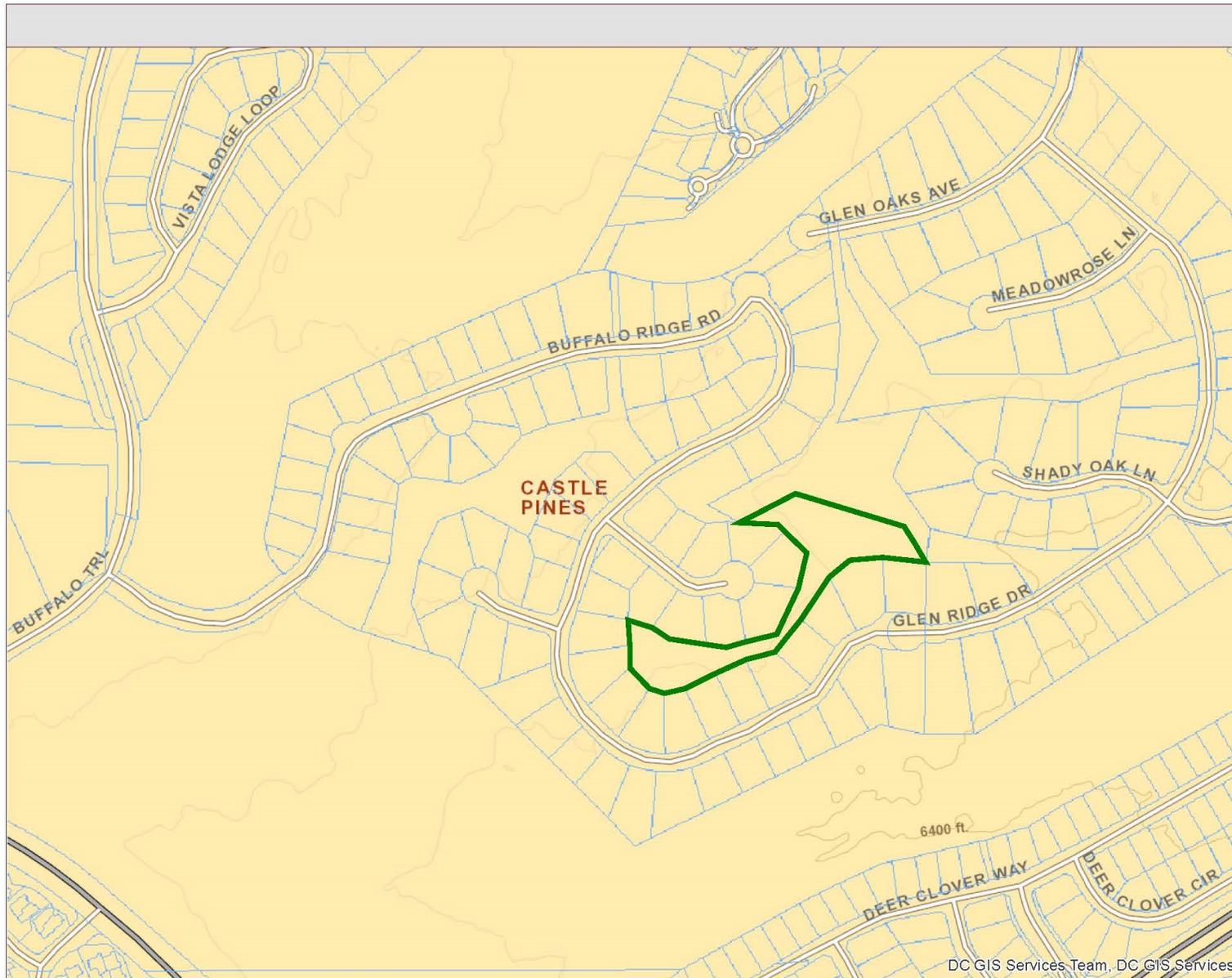
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Map 4: Open Space A - Aerial from Google Earth



# Map 5: Open Space B



### Real Property

 Parcel

### Public Land Survey System

 Township

 Section

### General Features

 School

 Private Road

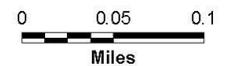
 Railroad

DC GIS Services Team, DC GIS Services

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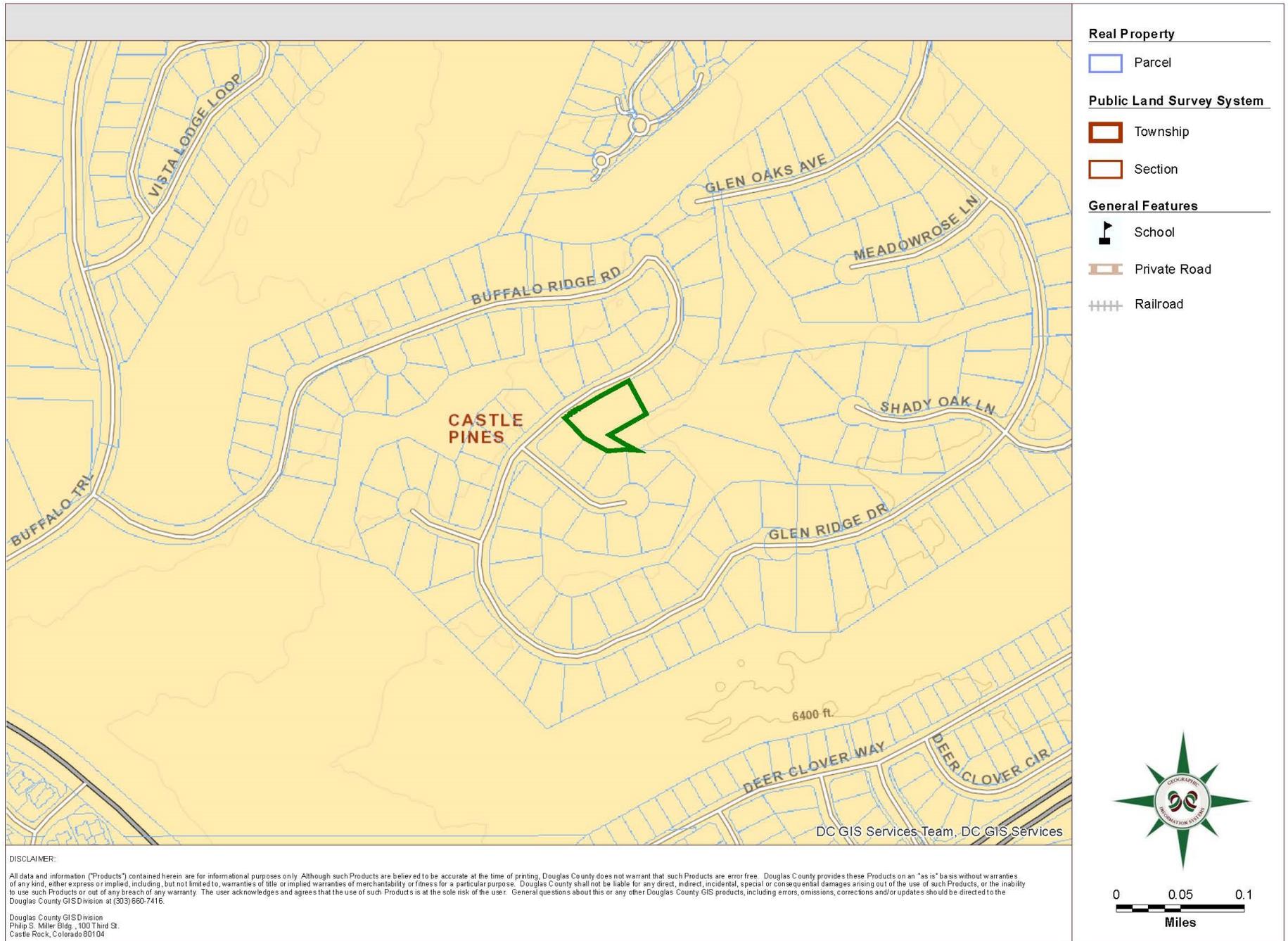
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Map 6: Open Space B - Aerial Image from Google Earth



# Map 7: Open Space C



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Map 8: Open Space C - Aerial Image from Google Earth

