

The Denver Post

North metro greenway is planned

\$200 million, 150-mile trail system to connect cities, Rocky Mountain Arsenal

By John Ingold
Denver Post Staff Writer

Thursday, July 01, 2004 -

Everybody loves open space.

Even mayors.

An almost-giddy group of state, city and county leaders announced Wednesday a plan to create a network of trails, greenbelts and open space in Denver, Aurora, Brighton, Commerce City, Thornton and parts of Adams County.

In total, the network will span 150 miles and connect Denver to Brighton, Aurora to Commerce City and everything to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

"I'm excited for it," said a grinning Ed Tauer, mayor of Aurora. "I think it's one of the neatest things we've been able to announce in a long while."

The new greenways will be in the fastest-growing spots in the state over the next 30 years. The project will preserve farmland where it's being depleted, wetlands where they are disappearing and open space where it is being developed, the officials promised.

The preservation will benefit the entire metro area, Thornton Mayor Noel Busck said, not only because of the recreational opportunities but also because cities can use the beauty of the green spaces as a selling point for new businesses.

"This is an issue of growth," Busck said. "Colorado is going to continue growing. We all know that. But what we need to do is to manage our growth."

Dubbed the Northeast Greenway Corridor, the project will take several years to complete and will require about \$200 million in contributions. It could cost nearly \$60 million over the next three years to acquire land and build trails for the first phase of the project, according to estimates.

Planners hope much of that money comes from two places. The first is from legal settlements over the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. For years, the arsenal was used by the Army to produce chemical weapons, then by Shell Oil for pesticide production. In 1984, the state filed claims against the two entities for the environmental damage their activities at the arsenal caused. A settlement on those claims is hopefully "in the offing," Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar said. Money from those potential settlements would be used to help build the greenway project. Officials hope the arsenal itself will become a showpiece of open space in the northeastern metro area, with trails on some parts of the grounds and a trolley running through others.

"It's going to become what I think is a national treasure to have all these greenways integrated around the arsenal," Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper said.

Planners hope the second major money source is Great Outdoors Colorado. The greenway organizers have submitted a proposal for a \$25 million grant from the group, said Andrew Wallach, a consultant to Hickenlooper.

The officials on Wednesday touted the greenway as symbolic of a new age of regional cooperation.

"We have a shared vision of what we can be as a metro area," Tauer said.

Staff writer John Ingold can be reached at 303-655-7735 or jingold@denverpost.com.