



# Parks & Open Space

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## **PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

Time/Date of Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024

Location: Boulder County Courthouse  
1325 Pearl Street, Third Floor, Boulder

<b>TO:</b>	<b>Parks &amp; Open Space Advisory Committee</b>
<b>FROM/PRESENTER:</b>	<b>Justin Atherton-Wood, Principal Planner, Parks &amp; Open Space Tonya Luebbert, Regional Trails Planner, Community Planning &amp; Permitting</b>
<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan</b>
<b>ACTION REQUESTED:</b>	<b>Information Only</b>

### OVERVIEW

Since 2019, Parks & Open Space has been participating on the Steering Committee for the Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan as led by the Regional Trails Program in the Department of Community Planning & Permitting. The draft BERT Plan ([BERT webpage](#)) is currently available for public comment and being shared throughout the community. The proposed plan is going before the Board of County Commissioners on October 10, 2024 for approval. At the September POSAC meeting, CP&P staff will be sharing an overview of the draft plan with POSAC as described in their attached memo. BCPOS staff will also be available to discuss the department's collaboration with the CP&P staff in planning for the BERT as outlined below.

### DISCUSSION

The concept of the BERT has been envisioned in adopted plans such as the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan and Transportation Master Plan for decades. The BERT has also been established as a top-five priority for the Regional Trails Program since the Countywide Transportation Sales Tax was first approved in 2001. As envisioned, the BERT would serve as a major regional trail corridor. As such, it would provide an alternative for commuters to make connections along the corridor without using cars. It would also provide abundant recreational opportunity itself while also improving access to open space areas, including BCPOS's Walden Ponds Wildlife Preserve and the planned Prairie Run Open Space.

The proposed alignment is located along an unused rail line on property owned primarily by BNSF Railway and generally within the Boulder Creek corridor. The corridor is largely rural in nature with gravel extraction, open space, agriculture, and rural residential uses predominating. As such, there are a number of environmental resources designated by the Environmental Resources Element in the planning area including Critical Wildlife Habitat, a High Biodiversity Area, Rare Plant Areas, Riparian and Wetland Areas, as well as other designations (see page 22 of the BERT plan). These ERE-designated resources are present mostly on lands on the western side of the project area located between 61<sup>st</sup> Street and

Highway 287. Most of the lands are owned and managed by the City of Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department and lie immediately adjacent to the corridor owned by the railway. The nest of a number of raptors and other migratory birds lie along this riparian corridor that influence management of the adjoining open space lands and are an on-going consideration in the planning for the BERT.

East of Highway 287, the planned trail corridor is farther from the creek and characterized more by rural residential uses. Some areas are also in the process of being annexed into the Town of Erie and utilized for residential development.

In terms of BCPOS lands within the planning area, there are two Open Space properties both leased for agriculture and located near Highway 287. They are MMS Partnership, located west of Highway 287; and Leyner 2, located immediately east of Highway 287. The land owned by BNSF Railway, within which the BERT would be located, bifurcates these parcels. Current agricultural practices take the land ownership pattern into account i.e., location of fields, roads, fences, and irrigation ditches. Since these properties are managed for agriculture, they are closed to public use.

However, there are two County Open Spaces near the BERT corridor that are or will be managed for public use. They are Walden Ponds Wildlife Preserve and Prairie Run Open Space. The opportunity for connecting with trails and amenities at Walden Ponds would likely occur by utilizing existing connectivity with Sawhill Ponds, an OSMP-managed open space. Sawhill Ponds is located between and adjacent to both the proposed BERT corridor to the south and Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat to the north.

As POSAC members may recall, BERT was a consideration in the management planning process for Prairie Run Open Space. BCPOS continues to collaborate with the Town of Erie and CP&P on making potential connections between BERT, trails planned for Prairie Run, and trails and other amenities being considered by the Town of Erie.

Since 2019, Parks & Open Space has been participating on the project's Steering Committee as led by CP&P. BCPOS staff have appreciated the opportunity the Steering Committee has provided as a venue for working collaboratively with the many partners we are consistently engaged with to support the success of the natural systems present in Boulder County while also seeking opportunities to provide community access to natural areas. In this area of the county, City of Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department (OSMP), the Town of Erie, and the Colorado Department of Parks & Wildlife (CPW) are important partners in the process. We appreciate that this planning effort has brought our agencies together to study a range of alternatives for the location of the trail in addition to supporting a robust public process that has included a Community Working Group. This work is making apparent the trade-offs at play in making a decision about the planned location of the trail and revealed the work that remains as the project moves into the design phase.



# Community Planning & Permitting

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## PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

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Location: Boulder County Courthouse  
1325 Pearl Street, Third Floor, Boulder

<b>TO:</b>	<b>Parks &amp; Open Space Advisory Committee</b>
<b>FROM/PRESENTER:</b>	Tonya Luebbert, Regional Trails Planner, CP&P
<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) Plan</b>
<b>ACTION REQUESTED:</b>	<b>Information Only</b>

This memo provides an update on the Boulder to Erie Regional Trail (BERT) planning process. This effort, led by Boulder County’s Community Planning & Permitting Department, evaluates conceptual alignments and identifies a preferred alignment for further consideration for an east-west multi-use trail connection between 61<sup>st</sup> Street in Boulder and East County Line Road in Erie. The planning process began in 2019 and is now in its final stages. The BERT Plan & Appendices are currently available for public review on the BERT webpage [boco.org/BERT](http://boco.org/BERT), and the plan will go before the Boulder County Board of County Commissioners on October 10, 2024.

### Project Overview:

- **Key Plans:** The trail connection is identified in the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan, Boulder County Transportation Master Plan, Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, and OSMP Visitor Master Plan.
- **Timeline:** The project began in 2019 and initially focused on the RTD-owned right-of-way (formerly a Union Pacific Rail line) but the project scope was later expanded to consider and evaluate additional alignments outside the rail corridor with the goal of minimizing environmental impacts. The planning process included seven phases, from initial data collection to the final plan.

**Stakeholder and Public Engagement:** Extensive stakeholder and community input went into the creation of the BERT Plan.

- **Steering Committee:** The Steering Committee for the BERT Plan consisted of representatives from County Community Planning & Permitting, Boulder County Parks & Open Space (BOCO POS), Boulder County Public Works (BOCO PW), City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), City of Boulder Transportation & Mobility, Town of Erie, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW), Regional Transportation District (RTD), and Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).
- **Community Working Group:** Community members volunteered to contribute their time and input to the development of the BERT Plan. Members included adjacent landowners, equestrian users, and representatives from local trails groups, cycling groups, and environmental groups (BCNA & Audubon Society).

- **Public Engagement Opportunities:** Four neighborhood workshops, three public meetings, and two online surveys, one that was statistically valid, were conducted to gather input.

**Initial Conceptual Alignments & Alignment Evaluation:** *(pages 34-119 of the BERT Plan)*

Conceptual alignments were developed within the RTD ROW, along with additional routes along Valmont/Isabelle Road and on OSMP lands. Multiple options to cross Hwy 287 were also considered. Evaluation criteria were also developed through extensive stakeholder collaboration to serve as a foundation for the evaluation of the alignments and for the selection of a preferred alignment for further consideration.

**Preferred Alignment for Further Consideration:** *(pages 124-159 of the BERT Plan)*

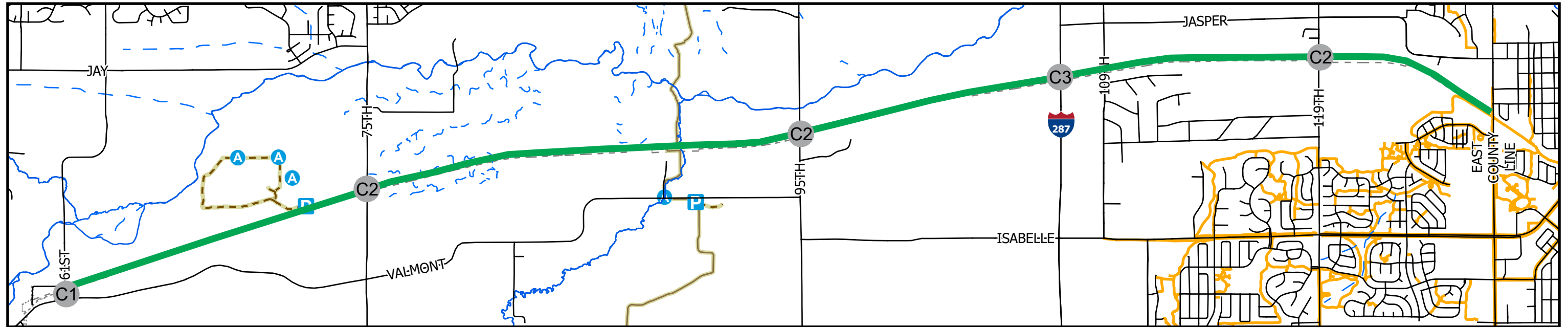
Alignment 1B, located within the RTD right-of-way (ROW), was selected for its safety, user experience, and minimal impact on adjacent properties. However, there are still environmental concerns as high-value ecological resources adjacent to the alignment require careful consideration and protection. If the plan is approved, environmental impact minimization and mitigation opportunities will continue to be evaluated in coordination with CPW and open space agencies during the next phases of the BERT project. While environmental resources west of Hwy 287 require more detailed analysis, the project team recognizes the eastern segment of the BERT has fewer environmental concerns and technical complications. In addition, some segments are likely to be constructed as part of planned residential development in Erie.

**Next Steps:** *(pages 173-174 of the BERT Plan)*

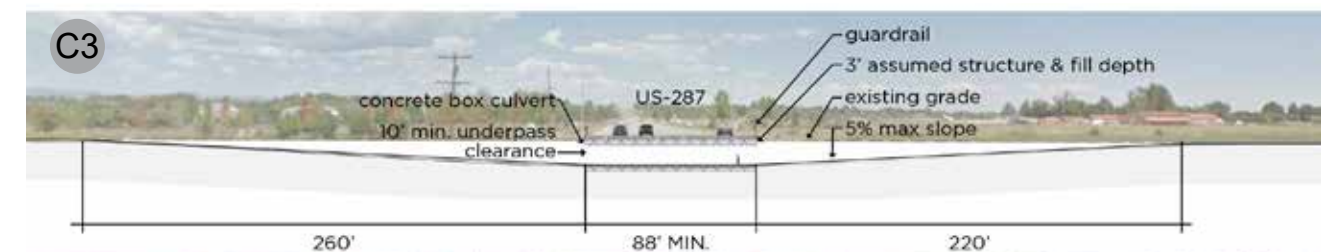
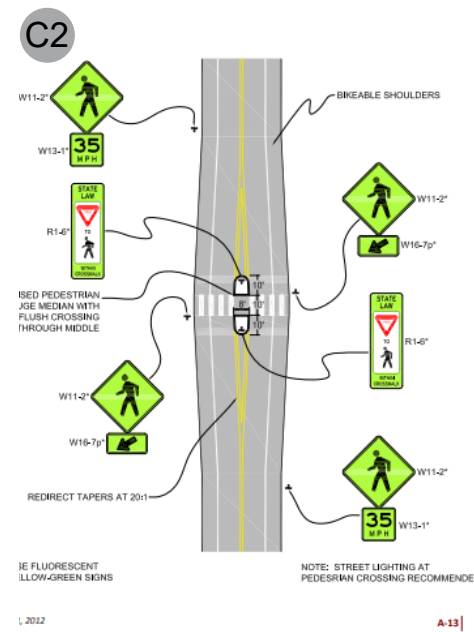
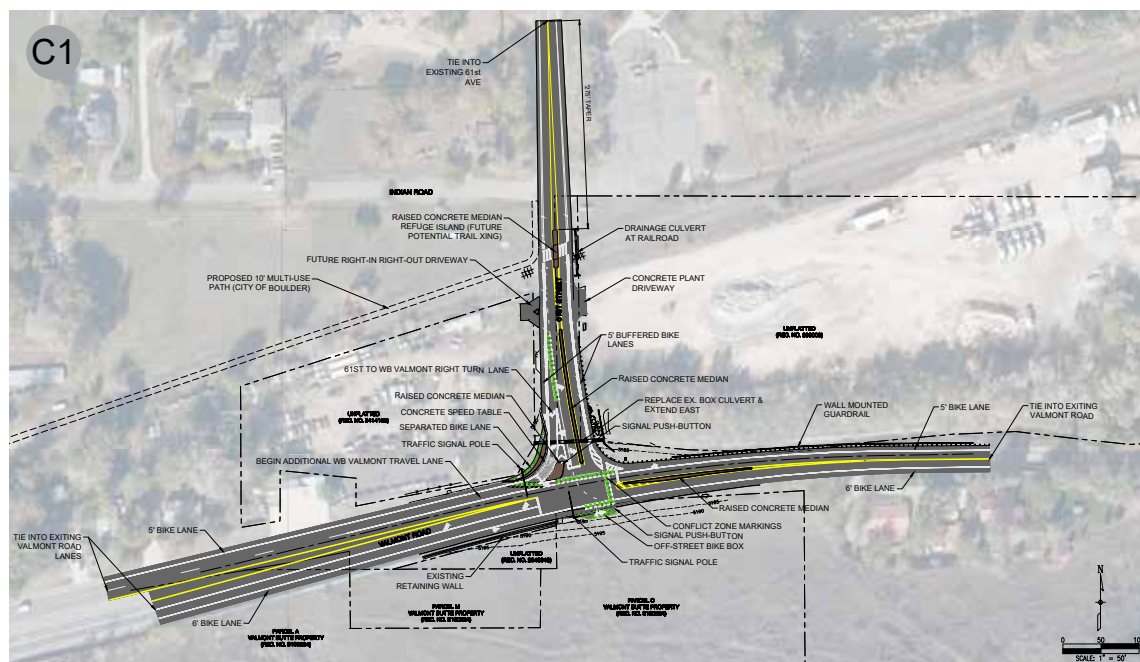
Following completion of this planning phase of the project and approval of a preferred alignment, funding sources and potential phasing will be identified, and engineering design will begin with environmental, cultural, topographic, and geotechnical surveys. Throughout the next phases of the project, Boulder County will work on obtaining all the necessary approvals and permitting. It is possible that the trail could be built in sections as funding and other opportunities allow.

# PREFERRED ALIGNMENT FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION DESCRIPTION

**ALIGNMENT 1B** - The preferred BERT trail alignment for further consideration is a 10ft wide soft surface trail located in the RTD row off of the rail bed, unless there is a wetland avoidance advantage gained by locating on top of the existing railbed. It crosses 75th, 95th, and 119th with Boulder County multi-modal standards crossing A-13 (crossing C2 below), crosses Hwy 287 with an underpass (crossing C3 below). 109th is crossed with a traditional crosswalk due to lower traffic volumes.



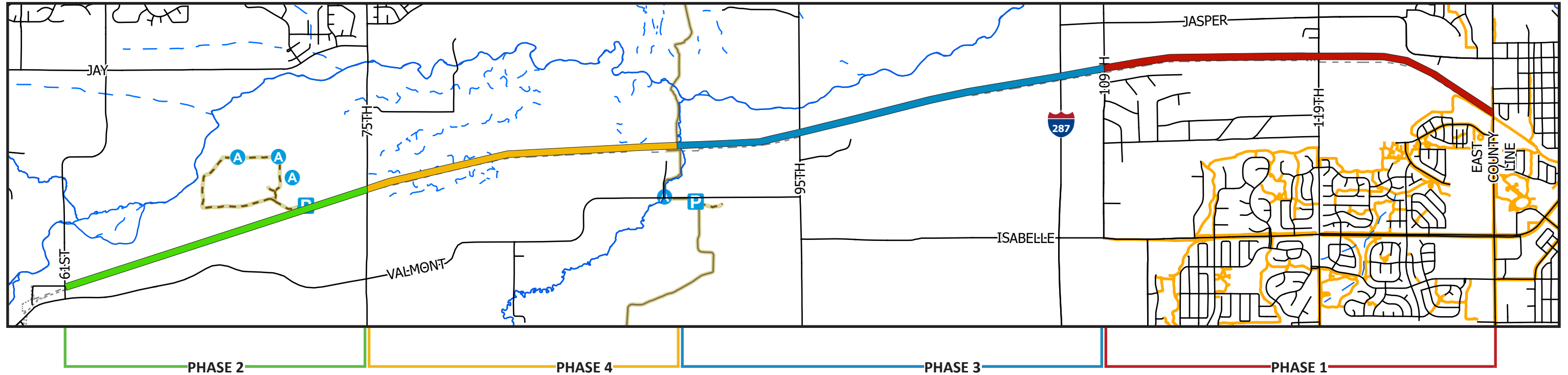
## Crossings





# PHASING PLAN

It is possible that the BERT could be constructed in phases. Survey, 30% design, and construction documents could be completed for the entire corridor with bid packages included in the final construction document set for the four construction phases identified. These proposed phases can be seen below.



## DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

## CONSTRUCTION PHASES

### SURVEYS FOR ENTIRE CORRIDOR

- Topographic
- Environmental
- Cultural
- Geotechnical

### 30% DESIGN FOR ENTIRE CORRIDOR

### DESIGN FOR EACH PHASE

- Construction documents for entire corridor with bid packages for each construction phase

### PHASE 1: E COUNTY LINE RD - 109TH

- Fewer resources & technical complications
- Lower cost - not likely to be on rail bed, no wetlands likely, no retaining wall needed
- Some segments already planned

### PHASE 2: 61ST - 75TH

- Similarly low level of technical complications
- More resource considerations
- Wet areas present, particularly close to 75th st.
- More costs likely due to wetland mitigation and possibility to locating trail on rail bed
- If wet areas are indeed wetlands, there will also be permitting needs

### PHASE 3: TELLER WHITE ROCKS TRAIL - 109TH

- Largely straightforward section for construction
- Underpass to incur significant costs and additional agreements, permitting, design and engineering needs

### PHASE 4: 75TH - TELLER WHITE ROCKS TRAIL

- Additional resources considerations, including discussion of nest recommendations and mitigation
- Wetlands likely and mitigation likely needed for water flow
- Higher costs associated with mitigation
- Adjacent agricultural operations and movement to consider