

Landmark Status for Historic Tree and Site

by Sally L. White

In May 2012, the Landmark Designation Committee approved the Colorow Council Tree and Rooney Ranch Picnic Site as the county's newest landmark. Because the site is located on Jeffco Open Space property along Dinosaur Ridge, the nomination had to be authorized by the Board of County Commissioners, as owner. The area was formerly part of the Rooney Ranch. This large ponderosa pine tree has long been remembered as a place where original settler Alex Rooney met with Colorow and other Utes and also reportedly negotiated peace between the Utes and neighboring Arapahoes. Colorow called it his "Inspiration Tree."

In later decades, the Red Rocks Lions Club and other local groups held gatherings on a stone patio and picnic area that was built by the Rooney Family next to the tree. During this period, the tree was also known as the Lighted Tree.

This designation marks the first natural feature to be named as a landmark, although the cultural site is specifically included as well. The site is also part of the Rooney Ranch National Register designation.

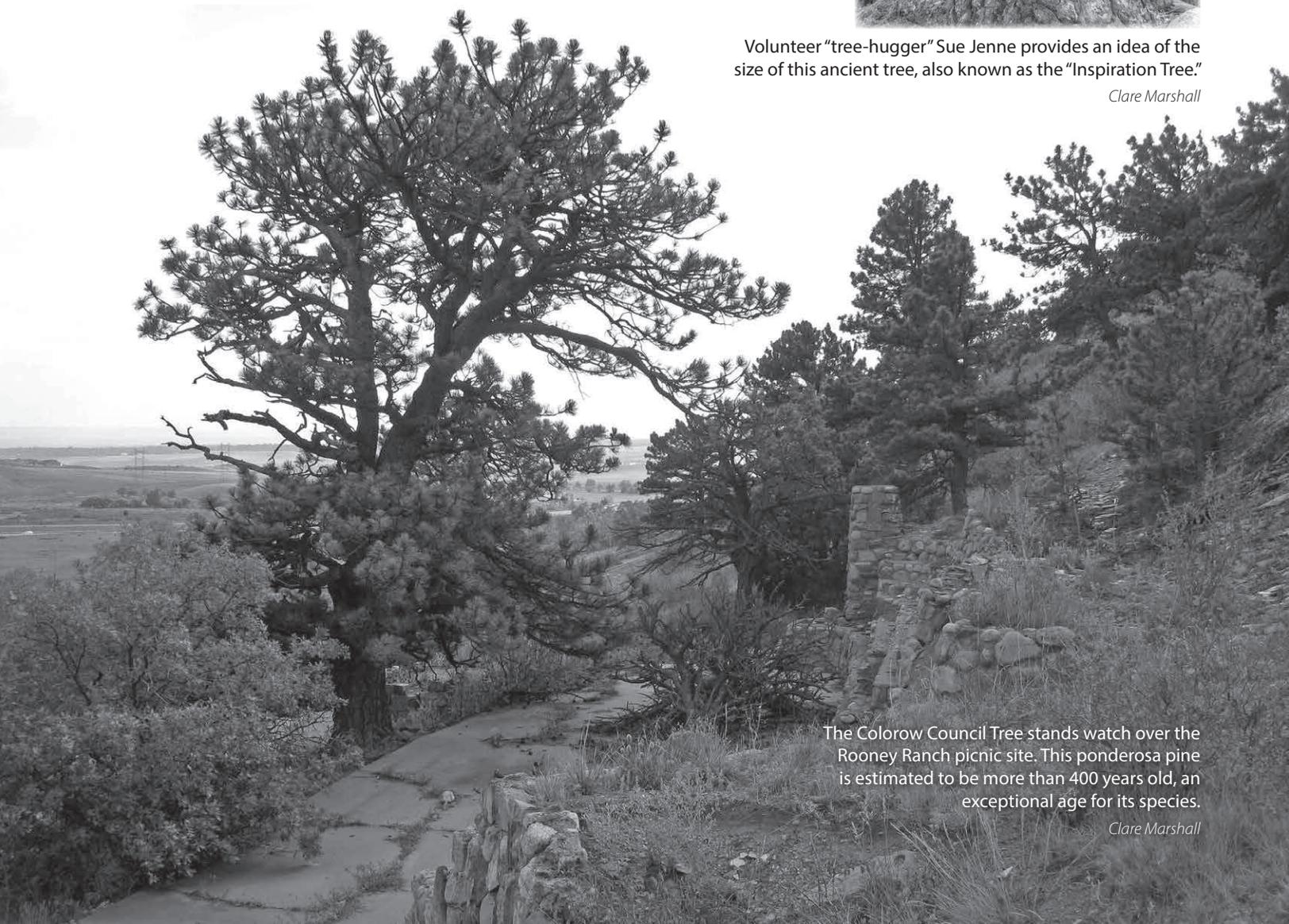
The nomination was proposed by historian Beth Simmons, author of a book on the Rooney Family. She also encouraged Open Space staff to investigate the age of the tree. A partial core

taken recently suggests the tree is at least 400 years old, and possibly much older, and thus was definitely alive during the lifetime of Chief Colorow (approximately 1813 to 1888). The tree appears to be healthy, although part of the interior is hollow. ☞



Volunteer "tree-hugger" Sue Jenne provides an idea of the size of this ancient tree, also known as the "Inspiration Tree."

Clare Marshall



The Colorow Council Tree stands watch over the Rooney Ranch picnic site. This ponderosa pine is estimated to be more than 400 years old, an exceptional age for its species.

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